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A SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Fr. Alexander, O.F.M.

A Spiritual Retreat

By FATHER ALEXANDER, O.F.M.

Author of
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PREFACE

ALTHOUGH the author has primarily in view the needs of men and women dedicated to the service of God in the cloister, he hopes that the Spiritual Retreat will find favour with that large class of Catholics in the outside world who aim at reproducing in themselves the cloister virtues—Humility, Docility, Patience, Generosity, Fortitude, and Self-Sacrifice. Inasmuch as he frequently exhorts Religious to emulate the strenuousness of those who have to battle with the world, so he would fain invite the latter to share in the peace enjoyed by those who give themselves altogether to God's service.

A general index has been provided, which he anticipates will render the volume useful for spiritual reading at all times, but more especially during the holy season of Pentecost.

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VENI, SANCTE SPIRITUS

VENI, Sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte cœlitus
Lucis tuæ radium.

Veni pater pauperum,
Veni dator munerum,
Veni lumen cordium.

Consolator optime,
Dulcis hospes animæ,
Dulce refrigerium.

In labore requies,
In æstu temperies,
In fletu solatium.

O lux beatissima,
Reple cordis intima,
Tuorum fidelium.

Sine tuo numine
Nihil est in homine,
Nihil est innoxium.

Lava quod est sordidum,
Riga quod est aridum,
Sana quod est saucium.

Flecte quod est rigidum,
Fove quod est frigidum,
Rege quod est devium.

Da tuis fidelibus,
In te confidentibus,
Sacrum septenarium.

Da virtutis meritum,
Da salutis exitum,
Da perenne gaudium. AMEN.

COME, HOLY GHOST

COME, Holy Ghost, send down those beams
Which sweetly flow in silent streams
From Thy bright throne above ;
O Come, Thou Father of the poor ;
O Come, Thou Source of all our store ;
Come, fill our hearts with love.

O Thou, of comforters the best ;
O Thou, the soul's delightful guest ;
The pilgrim's sweet relief ;
Thou art true rest in toil and sweat,
Refreshment in th' excess of heat,
And solace in our grief.

Thrice blessèd light, shoot home Thy darts,
And pierce the centres of those hearts
Whose faith aspires to Thee ;
Without Thy Godhead nothing can
Have any price or worth in man,
Nothing can harmless be.

Lord, wash our sinful stains away,
Refresh from heaven our barren clay,
Our wounds and bruises heal ;
To Thy sweet yoke our stiff necks bow,
Warm with Thy fire our hearts of snow,
Our wand'ring feet repeal.

Grant to Thy faithful, dearest Lord,
Whose only hope is Thy sure word,
The seven gifts of Thy Spirit ;
Grant us in life Thy helping grace,
Grant us in death to see Thy face,
And endless joys inherit.

A SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Eve of Retreat

I.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus,
Et emitte cœlitus
Lucis tuæ radium.

(Come, Holy Ghost, send down those beams
Which sweetly flow in silent streams
From Thy bright throne above.)

1. "Come, Holy Ghost!"

HOW our hearts should thrill in being privileged to call on Omnipotence with the certainty of being heard. Come!

No earthly king could be addressed with like insistence; and, accustomed as we are to have our favours conveyed through intermediary channels, we would not thus dare to raise our voice to God, but that the Church herself puts the word on our lips.

In pleading with men for the smallest favour—nay, for our natural rights—we must bow down and wait in lowly expectation; yet not always, alas! with the certainty of being heeded. And thus, through force of habit, we often carry this dejected spirit into the court of the King of kings. The Church, who is the earthly custodian of that court, bids us be of good heart; for although she is ever keenly jealous of the dignity of God, she hesitates not to authorize the seemingly bold words of the text. She has the sanction of the Great Spirit to whom the words are addressed; she uses the privilege of her teaching mission: "But the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you" (*St. John* xiv. 26). And it behoves a teaching Church to inspire her children with confidence in her Divine Founder—a confidence born of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

So, when the Holy Ghost sanctions the use of the emphatic language we have quoted, we may rest assured that He means to

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attend to our pleadings. He is "the Spirit of Wisdom and of Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and of Fortitude, the Spirit of Knowledge and of Godliness" (*Isa.* xi. 2). He understands our needs, and out of the depths of His wisdom, He will most amply provide for them; He knows our weakness, and will bless us with fortitude; He is conscious of our ignorance, and will make good the defects in our intelligence with counsel and knowledge; He witnesses our temptations and our occasional falls, and will lift us up and lead us into the pathway of godliness. But all these Divine favours will depend on the faith and earnestness with which we cry, "Come, Holy Ghost!" He warns us to be humble, but at the same time He would have us confident; for the "fear of sons" casts out servility: "and because you are sons, God hath sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father" (*Gal.* iv. 6).

What encouragement, therefore, for the poor sinner who, with the prodigal, would fain cry out: "I will arise, and will go to my father" (*St. Luke* xv. 18), but that he scarcely dares; what hope for the tempted, who, struggling with his lower self, exclaims with St. Paul: "But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am: who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (*Rom.* vii. 23, 24). What joy for the clean of heart who, even before the time, find within themselves a foreshadowing of the Beatitude: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (*St. Matt.* v. 8). For their self-immolation on the altar of chastity is at once a perpetual invocation of the sweet but emphatic words: "Come, Holy Ghost!" and an assurance that He has responded, by visiting them and by taking up His abode in their souls.

2. Contrasts to this benign operation of the Holy Ghost are found in all ages and among all classes of men; hence the hatred that has existed, the rivers of blood that have run, and the world-wide unhappiness and unrest that too often have prevailed. Nations have pleaded for the inalienable rights accorded by the Spirit of God when He sanctioned their birth; but tyrants have closed their ears to age-long cries for redress when those rights were denied. They have likewise shut their eyes to justice and their hearts to mercy; and so, even to this day, some nations continue to groan, with little hope of emancipation from their wrongs.

Children cry for parental love, and almost unconsciously long for better example, with that wondrous longing after higher things that God has implanted in their tender breasts; but all in vain. Schools are often mere technical laboratories rather than sanctuaries of Godly education, as they were of old. Convents, too, are betimes centres of selfish enterprise, worldly ambition, jealousy, envy, and strife, rather than shrines of sanctity, mutual edification, and peace. Oh, what contrasts we find, in all spheres of human activity, as between the inaccessibility of man and the easy accessibility of God! What contrasts between man's harshness and God's mercy!

If it is asked how such things can be: how, whilst the Holy Spirit of God is so accessible, so kind, and so merciful, men in the aggregate and individually are so unapproachable, so selfish and merciless, an answer is given by the inspired writer: "With desolation is all the land made desolate; because there is none that considereth in the heart" (*Jer.* xii. 11). Nations, families, and communities are but a collection of individuals, and if at times those individuals suspend not their mundane occupations to hold sweet converse with the Author of their being, and to invoke the light of His Spirit, no wonder that their pathway is darkened, and that they become victims to all their lower instincts. No wonder that they are incapable of sounding the depths of human woe, and impotent in offering remedies. No wonder that when men ask for bread they have but stones to offer; that little ones weep on; and that communities drift into a Dead Sea, whose waters are brackish and unwholesome, and whose banks are barren and forbidding. If we took pains to trace the history of heresy, apostasy, and even lesser deflections from the line of duty, we should find their beginnings either in contemptuous refusal to seek the aid of the Most High in silence, retreat, and prayer, or in virtual neglect of these most needful helps.

There are few who have not had sad personal experience of the evils above spoken of. Days without number passed over our heads wholly devoted either to merely worldly work or to sentimental nothings, and sin upon sin was committed. There was no light in the soul, for it was shut out; harshness, selfishness, and perhaps even more heinous failings were nourished in the unwholesome darkness. But, thanks be to God, a day dawned that ushered in enforced solitude, and afforded time for deep reflection; and in the light, at length admitted, we saw our folly. We emerged from

our solitude much kinder than it had been our wont to be; neighbours wondered at our new-born patience, forbearance, sympathy, and simplicity; but *we* did not wonder, for we knew that beams had come down from the Heavenly Throne, and that the Spirit of God had visited us. What was then a providential accident should in this Retreat be made a fixed resolve. We should *hug* our solitude, love silence, examine our *conscience*, adore the Spirit of God within our souls, and nourish the hope that we shall emerge from the Retreat, as Moses did from the cloud, with abundant light within the soul: yea, with such abundant light as will enable us to scatter radiance all around, through the visible reformation of our lives.

In studying the contrasts already spoken of, those who are led by the Spirit of God cannot but think of that remote time when "the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters" (*Gen.* i. 2). But in bewailing the darkness that has again overtaken the world, their hearts though saddened are not discouraged, for with the Psalmist they exclaim: "Thou shalt send forth thy Spirit and they shall be created: *and thou shalt renew the face of the earth*" (*Ps.* ciii. 30). They rise from the study of those gloomy contrasts, occasioned by the deafness, the blindness, and the harshness of men, with the deep conviction that there is *One* who listens, who sees, and who is as tender as He is just: for He is God! Great indeed is their jubilation as they cry: "*Come*, Holy Ghost! Come and renew the face of the earth!" If *we* have hitherto been saddened by enemy attacks from without, or by troubles within, or even by deplorable personal failures, let us unite with those good souls in a similar fervent invocation: "Come, Holy Ghost, come and renew the souls Thou hast created! Come in this Retreat and dispel the darkness. Come and forgive our iniquities. Come and complete the work of our sanctification."

3. This is precisely our purpose in undertaking the work on hand—we are here to plead for forgiveness; we await light, strength, and love.

The text suggests how we are to plead—*i.e.*, with emphasis: *Come!* The word is to be on our lips and in our hearts at every step of our upward way. I say advisedly "our upward way," for unless we co-operate with the preventing grace that God has already given by convoking this assembly, we cannot expect Him

to hear our prayer. He wants us to climb in our anxiety to meet Him. He helps those who help themselves. We are to plead with *humility*, for "the prayer of him who humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds; and he will not depart till the Most High behold" (*Ecclus.* xxxv. 21).

We are to plead with *perseverance*, for "no man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God" (*St. Luke* ix. 62); "only he who perseveres to the end shall be saved" (*St. Matt.* xxiv. 13). In truth, a retreat should be regarded as the end of a purposeless life, and the beginning of one fit to be projected into a happy eternity. Finally, we are to plead with *confidence*, otherwise we shall receive nothing from the Spirit of God. "You ask and receive not, because you ask amiss" (*St. Jas.* iv. 3). He asks amiss who asks with doubting mind or with hesitating lips. Even in daily life that man is spurned whose faltering accents betray the fact that he trusts not to the generosity of his patron. "But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind; therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord" (*St. Jas.* i. 6, 7). "O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" (*St. Matt.* xiv. 31).

Let us beware, in this Retreat, of repeating a fault which hitherto may have been the bane of our spiritual lives—viz., sending up kites to heaven, fashioned entirely after our own will, and vainly expecting God to gild them with the sunshine of His blessings. This, alas! is the secret in many cases of spiritual sterility. Our souls produce no fruit because we co-operate not with the will of God. "I have planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 *Cor.* iii. 6). In pleading for grace, we must prove ourselves to be receptive vessels by corresponding with the will of God, that breathes wheresoever it will. Like St. Paul, we must cry, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (*Acts* ix. 6); and then, with him, we shall be able to say: "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me" (*Phil.* iv. 3).

Such dispositions may be voiced thus: "Come, O Holy Spirit, in all Thy fire, in all Thy strength, in all Thy sweetness, in all Thy light, and in all Thy love. Come, and by Thy fire consume in me the dross of evil passion, and inflame me with a longing for perfection; come, and by Thy strength remedy my weaknesses, for I am weak indeed and prone to yield before the smallest foe; come, and by Thy sweetness calm my turbulent heart and regulate

my unruly tongue ; come, and by Thy light help me to see the way of Thy commands and to delight in the narrow and steep heights of Thy counsels—that I may likewise see the evil in my own poor heart, and discover the good that lies hidden in the hearts of others ; come, and by Thy love make of me a whole burnt offering on the altar of Thy Divine will."

As an earnest of the sincerity of these words the Retreat should be marked by the spirit of prayer, silence, punctuality, and docility of heart. Visits to the Blessed Sacrament should be paid with more than usual devotion ; tendencies to sadness and depression should be sternly suppressed. The frame of mind best suited to an efficacious Retreat is that of the disciples in the upper room, awaiting the descent of the Holy Ghost, and " persevering with one mind in prayer " (*Acts* i. 14). And the model set up for our hourly encouragement should be our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane ; for our wrestlings with our human nature could not otherwise be sustained. Jacob of old, to obtain a blessing, had to wrestle with the angel. The blessings sought by us can be obtained only by wrestling with our lower selves. The *Fiat* of Christ was prefaced by a struggle ! "He began to grow sad. Then he saith unto them : My soul is sorrowful, even unto death : stay you here and watch with me. . . . My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. . . . Again the second time he went and prayed, saying : My Father, if this chalice may not pass away, but I must drink it, thy will be done. . . . And he prayed the third time, saying the selfsame words " (*St. Matt.* xxvi. 37-44).

Reverence for that model and deep conviction of the magnitude of the task before us will be preservatives against levity, safeguards of silence and recollections, incentives to penance, stimulants to fervent prayer, and powerful aids in the framing of such efficacious resolutions as may be inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

May we be comforted by the presence of our sweet Mother Mary, and supported by her aid. May our Saintly Patrons and our Angel Guardians be companions of our solitude, so that our steps may be sure. May we emerge from that solitude with our minds enlightened to see the holy will of God, and with our hearts strengthened to do His most holy will to the end. Amen.

II.—VENI, PATER PAUPERUM

(Oh, come, Thou Father of the Poor.)

1. IN the third chapter of the Apocalypse there is found a passage which throws considerable light on the relative values of worldly and unworldly wealth. It is part of the message sent to the Angel of the Church of Laodicea and reads thus: "Thou sayest, I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold fire-tried, that thou mayest be made rich, and mayest be clothed in white garments . . . and anoint thy eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see" (*Apoc.* iii. 17, 18).

From this we see that while worldlings understand by riches whatever ministers to their mere terrestrial happiness, God understands by riches the graces that are the fruits of virtue here, and which are to be changed into glory hereafter. These are the white garments spoken of in the Apocalypse. Worldly goods will ultimately perish, whereas spiritual gains, if loyally husbanded to the end, will be stored up for us in Heaven. "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where the rust and the moth consume, and where thieves break through and steal, but lay up to yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither the rust nor moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through nor steal, for where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also" (*St. Matt.* vi. 19-21).

Does not a survey of the world convince us that by the great majority of men only worldly goods are valued, while supernatural treasures are either contemned or neglected? "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light" (*St. Luke* xvi. 3). Oh, what a sad prospect for the contemplation of those whose souls, illuminated by the beams of light that stream down from the Heavenly Throne, are now more gifted than before with spiritual insight! If hitherto our vision has been so obscured by the vapours arising from the morass of the world, that we have not been able to see where danger lurks, let us now try to see, aided by the light that is given, in order that we may avoid it with scrupulous care. In many passages of Scripture God fondly invites us to adjust or readjust our point of view: "Love not the world nor the things that are in the world, for all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, the concupiscence

of the eyes, and the pride of life" (1 *St. John* ii. 15, 16); "For what doth it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul, or what exchange shall a man give for his soul?" (*St. Matt.* xvi. 26).

In the light of these texts we see the folly of seeking and prizing gold, silver, and precious stones, broad acres and luxurious homes, elegant dress and dainty fare, if they blind us to the real purpose of existence. For the purpose of life is so to practise virtue and to hoard up grace as to become rich in merit here, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and with Him to be exalted in glory hereafter. *These* are the riches that should be made the end of our ardent desires, and for the acquisition of which we should acquit ourselves as good soldiers of Christ: "For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also" (*St. Matt.* vi. 21). "Charge the rich of this world not to be high-minded, nor to trust in the uncertainty of riches, but in the living God (who giveth us abundantly all things to enjoy), to do good, to be rich in good works, to give easily, to communicate to others, to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on the true life" (1 *Tim.* vi. 17-19).

The surest way to lay hold on the true life is first to realize the abject nature of our spiritual poverty so that, loathing it, we may take resolute steps to escape from its sordidness. Then, deeply conscious of our inability to rise above its level without aid from on high, our souls will cry out, in the words of the text: "Oh, come, Thou Father of the poor!" Come and reveal to us where true riches lie hidden! Disclose to us, O Lord, how to make them our own! Come, in fine, and clothe our souls which are, alas! either despoiled of the robes of grace by mortal sin or, if clothed, have their spiritual garments soiled with many imperfections.

2. For the better understanding of our spiritual poverty, let us recall the state of our first parents before the Fall. Rich, indeed, beyond all powers of description, were the progenitors of the human race. After having been created in the state of perfect nature—*i.e.*, in a state free from the slightest blemish—they were constituted in sanctifying grace and enriched with innumerable actual graces, besides the well-known preternatural gifts. No wonder that saintly writers have given to the world page after page eulogistic of the wonderful endowments of the guardians of the earthly paradise. No wonder that poets have soared to their

loftiest heights in extolling their privileges. Trustees as they were for posterity, the favours heaped upon them should have been bequeathed to subsequent generations, and we, their children, should be in the enjoyment of the fruits of their constancy. But alas! they proved unfaithful, and left to us only a legacy of poverty and suffering. Poverty-stricken as we are, the words of the parable, applied by our Blessed Lord to the prodigal, may also be applied to every child of Adam: "He began to be in want and no one gave unto him" (*St. Luke* xv. 14).

Had not God, the Father of the poor, been moved to pity, and deigned to send His Divine Son to be clothed in our human nature, to suffer and to die for our restoration, poor as is the human race now, it would have been indescribably more poor and miserable. The prime gift of sanctifying grace, lost in the earthly paradise, was restored through the shedding of the Precious Blood. That restoration, however, did not bring in its train the other precious gifts with which our first parents had been provided. The race was to exist and travel the weary road of life cursed to the end by poverty of the flesh, through the birth of every child in a state of fallen nature—*i.e.*, mulcted in the intellectual, physical, and moral integrity that prevailed before the Fall; cursed by poverty of the spirit, through loss of the robe of sanctifying grace, until the work of restoration, effected by the Redeemer, should be complemented by the saving waters of Baptism.

How keenly this state of poverty was felt by our first parents is manifest by the shame they experienced in discovering the loss of their integrity. From that period, how unspeakably poor has been every child born into the world, with the sole exception of Mary, our Immaculate Mother. She, by a special privilege of God, the Father of the poor, through the foreseen merits of Jesus Christ, was in the first moment of her Conception freed from the curse and clothed with sanctifying grace. But even she had to bear the *external* effects of the curse: she had to endure the winter's cold and the summer's heat; a state of penury was her lot, and her glorious Assumption into heaven had to be preceded by a passage through the portals of death. Well may every child of Adam exclaim with the Psalmist: "Look thou upon me, and have mercy on me, for I am alone and poor" (*Ps.* xxiv. 16); and again: "But I am needy and poor; O God, help me. Thou art my helper and my deliverer: O Lord, make no delay" (*Ps.* lxix. 6). Only by the hearty voicing of these words can we

prove to God and to our own conscience that our spirit is not that of the world, which, seemingly unconscious of its real poverty, rolls on, like a ship without ballast, towards the lee shore of destruction.

3. Let it not be imagined that we exaggerate. After almost two thousand years of Christianity, how fares it, in general, with the world? Is it not buried in the darkness of Paganism; or shivering in the cold of Atheism, Schism, and Agnosticism; or lolling in the lap of luxury? Darkness, frigidity, and luxury may have induced such stupor as renders the world forgetful of its misery, but that deplorable state cannot be hidden from eyes whose range of vision has been enlarged by the light that streams from on high. The operation of the Holy Spirit has made the scales fall from our eyes, and thus, under the outward magnificence of the world, we behold but dead men's bones. Underneath the gorgeous robes that bedeck the bodies of its votaries we see souls bereft of every vestige of grace. What example of material poverty, no matter how squalid, can fill us with a horror equal to that which overtakes us when we contemplate the spiritual poverty of the world and its votaries? And yet, profiting by the lessons that have been given in all epochs, the world should rather be found loving the light, exulting in the warmth of charity, and bearing at least some traces of the mortification inculcated by the Master. And those who are its votaries should rather be found clothed with the garments of goodness that have ever been, and still are, within easy reach of all.

What has been said of the world in general can be said with equal truth of nations in particular. There have been times in the history of nations when not a few of them merited the appellation of "saintly," and gloried in the title, but, as may have been gathered from our introductory meditation, high spiritual ideals have, for ages past, been ruthlessly set aside in favour of ideals that appeal only to the senses. Where is now to be found a nation that could stand the test of canonization?

As with the world in general and with nations in particular, so also, alas! is it, in a certain measure, with Institutions raised up in bygone days for the glory and honour of God. It is a theme likely to fill our souls with sadness and to cover our brows with shame, but if we are, from a spiritual point of view, to realize our poverty, it cannot well be passed over. Have not Religious

Orders become so infected with the spirit of the world as to be, in some cases, almost unrecognizable as the inheritors of a glorious past? In their origin and for generations after they were conspicuous for the richness of their spiritual patrimony: rich in charity and self-abnegation; lofty in learning; generous in missionary zeal; fruitful in sanctity. As the Orders and Congregations in the Church are legion, it would be an endless task to attempt an enumeration, but if retreatants confine their reflections to the history of their own Institute, who can think of its past glories without feeling his heart beat faster, and who can contrast the past with the present without reproaching himself with tepidity? Where now do we find shining reflections of the charity, penance, learning, zeal, and sanctity that illumined the world, far and wide, in those golden days of religious fervour? May it not be that the drabness and coldness of the world at the present time are largely due to our indifference: to our neglect of prayer and study, to our immortification, and to our lack of zeal for the salvation of souls?

Humbling to our pride though these reflections may be, they must not be allowed to cause pessimism, nor are they to deprive us of hope; for the modern historian would not seek in vain for records of contemporary virtue and learning. Even to-day in every Order there are many shining lights. But the pity is that those lights are not more abundant for the better illumination of the darkened world. The pity is that the religious habit is not worn with such distinction, in general as well as in particular, as is likely to attract those without. Worldlings would be more likely to clothe themselves with grace, if they everywhere saw evidences of that vesture in those who live in the earthly court of the King of kings.* In no age, perhaps, have religious found it easier to attire themselves in those robes than in the present: for the striking examples of virtue in modern Popes and the sanctity of several youthful Religious who have lived in recent times have pointed the way. Frequent Communion, an increase in appealing devotions, a multiplicity of indulgences, and a flood of devotional books have afforded the means.

If hitherto we have in any way been remiss in attempting to reach the standard set up by our holy Founders and attained by so many of our predecessors in the Institute, it behoves us to reanimate our fervour: that fervour which doubtless was ours

* "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (*St. Matt.* v. 16).

when we spurned worldly attire and put on the religious habit. On that day we chose God as our Master and Heaven as our home. Aided by His grace, let us return in this Retreat to our First Love, remembering that: "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other: or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (*St. Matt.* vi. 24).

4. This Retreat is yet another proof of the solicitude of God, the Father of the poor, to clothe our souls with all the graces they need. Others, perhaps even members of this community, have, since the last Retreat, been called to render an account of their stewardship. We have been spared. Is not this in itself a special grace? Should it not be regarded as an extraordinary call on the part of God? Alarming to a degree are His threats when such calls are disregarded: "Because I called, and you did not answer: I spoke and you did not hear: and you did evil in my eyes, and you have chosen the things that displease me. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God: Behold my servants shall eat, and you shall be hungry: behold my servants shall drink, and you shall be thirsty: behold my servants shall rejoice, and you shall be confounded: behold my servants shall praise for joyfulness of heart, and you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for grief of spirit" (*Isa.* lxv. 12-16).

God forbid that we should incur these evils! To avoid them there is but one way: to discover whether we have chosen the things that displease Him, or, on the contrary, those that merit His blessings. If the former, let us, profoundly moved by the consciousness of our spiritual poverty, cry out with the prodigal, "I will arise, and will go to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (*St. Luke* xv. 18, 19). These contrite sentiments will appease the Heavenly Father's wrath and He will most readily respond to our heart's desire. We could not dare imagine the nature of that response, had not our Blessed Lord come to our aid; for no finite mind could fathom the depth of mercy that is revealed in the Gospel of St. Luke: "And rising up he came to his father. And when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and running to him, fell upon his neck and kissed him. . . . And the father said

to his servants: Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us eat and make merry: because this my son was dead, and is come to life again: was lost and is found" (*St. Luke* xv. 20-24). Hard, indeed, must be the heart that is not moved by this proof of tender compassion! God grant that no such heart beats within the bosom of anyone making this Retreat.

Although there is but one offence that occasions the loss of the robe of sanctifying grace—viz., mortal sin—yet there are many lesser offences which cause that robe to be woefully stained, rent, and faded. Who that has a shred of gratitude or a particle of compunction left will delay in having those defects made good, especially when he is most cordially invited to ask for all he needs with the certainty of being heard? "Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh, receiveth: and he that seeketh, findeth: and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened" (*St. Matt.* vii. 7).

If our conscience reprove us not, if we have chosen the things that are pleasing to God, we owe our perseverance in virtue to His infinite goodness. Let us not fail to render becoming thanks, for He it is who has clothed us with the garments of salvation. He did so in most signal fashion when He clothed us with the religious habit, which is symbolical of the virtues to be practised that the soul may be clothed and adorned with grace. The habit in itself is typical of obedience and poverty; the veil, of modesty and humility; the cincture, of chastity and penance. Oh, far from being content with symbols, let us henceforth strive after the great realities, so that we may be able to exclaim: "And I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, and my soul shall be joyful in my God: for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation: and with the robe of justice he hath covered me, as a bridegroom decked with a crown, and as a bride adorned with her jewels" (*Isa.* lxi. 10).

III.—VENI, DATOR MUNERUM

(Oh, come, Thou Source of all our store.)

1. THAT God is, indeed, the Father of the poor, is made clear by even a partial review of our gifts. "Every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no change, nor shadow of alteration" (*St. Jas.* i. 17). Whether we regard them in the natural or in the supernatural order, we are struck with wonderment at their excellence, and moved to gratitude for their bestowal. We feel that gratitude can best be shown by using those gifts to the best advantage.

If our past lives chide us for lack of appreciation, or for idleness in the use of our gifts, the fault is traceable to want of reflection: "With desolation is all the land made desolate: because there is none that considereth in the heart" (*Jer.* xii. 11). This Retreat should not be allowed to pass by without effecting a change of conduct. We should ponder deeply over the value of the treasures with which God has enriched us; beg His direction in putting them to profit; consider the price paid for their ransom, and determine, as long as life lasts, to manifest our gratitude. If we use these precious hours as the Holy Spirit wishes, the words of the Psalmist will be in our hearts and on our lips: "My heart shall rejoice in thy salvation: I will sing to the Lord who giveth me good things: yea, I will sing to the name of the Lord, the Most High" (*Ps.* xii. 6).

We are literally lost in a forest of "good things." From birth they have become so familiar to us that they almost cease to impress us. Yet, to ignore them would be to deprive ourselves of easy and pleasant means of glorifying God, and of enriching our souls. The air we breathe, the food we eat, the garments we wear, are the gifts of God. Our senses put us in communication with all kinds of marvellous things in the universe, which for the time being is our resting-place. They, likewise, are God's gifts to us. Our minds interchange ideas with the minds of others who, fashioned like ourselves, are yet different from us and from each other. But the differences blend into delightful harmony, as the voices of all unite in praising and extolling the works of God, who is the Giver of every good gift. Our neighbours' cheerful words and encouraging smiles, their helpful deeds and their kindly

looks, are to be regarded as gifts most precious, bestowed by the Father of lights to illumine a way that might otherwise be dark.

How woefully benighted we should be if we left the contemplation of God's gifts in the natural order to the mere Naturalist, or to the poets of Agnosticism! God forbid that we should hesitate to follow the example of Christ, who drew most admirable lessons from the humblest flowers in His Father's garden, and from the ordinary habits of His Father's children. The early Fathers of the Church loved to appeal to the most homely incidents of human life in preaching their sublime Homilies. St. Francis de Sales, in his sermons and letters, revealed a soul that owed much of its beauty to the contemplation of the beauteous things in nature. And who can be ignorant of the love of St. Francis of Assisi for all that proceeded from the creative hand of God? From the lordly sun in the heavens down to the pool in which his beams were reflected; from the soaring skylark to the bleating lamb that followed his stigmatized feet, St. Francis—within those wide limits of inanimate and animate nature—found myriads of things suggestive of prayer and praise. To him the sun was a brother and the moon a sister; fire and water were to him symbols of the Unction of the Holy Spirit of God, and of the cleansing power of Baptism: nothing was unnoticed that could be availed of to swell the volume of spiritual song that was ever issuing from the lips of the Seraphic Patriarch. Surely, we are mindful also of the practice of St. Ignatius, who was accustomed in the depths of the night to stand for hours gazing into the starry heavens. What was he doing but reading a book printed by the finger of God? Whereas the mere astronomer loses himself in the contemplation of the heavens, St. Ignatius lost himself in God, the Omnipotent Creator of the heavens.

Let the great saints be our guides in the pursuit of our spiritual journey and we shall not fail to reach the bourne in safety. The contemplation of the "good things" provided by God for our study will remind us that He "loveth all the things that are, and hateth none of the things that he hath made" (*Wisd.* xi. 25). "For he beholdeth the end of the world: and looketh on all things that are under heaven" (*Job* xxviii. 24). "Thou hast visited the earth, and hast plentifully watered it: thou hast many ways enriched it" (*Ps.* lxiv. 10). The study of the good things of the earth but whets our spiritual appetite for the better things prepared for us in the heavenly pastures.

2. Coming now to the consideration of our personal gifts, we should dispose ourselves to gratitude for all past favours, examine our consciences with regard to their use or abuse, and form such resolutions as will tend to the amendment of our lives. Let us first of all pass in review our time, our talents, and our opportunities.

Who can adequately describe the value of time? Under God there are scarcely any limits to its possibilities for good or for evil. Some saint has said that a moment of time may be made equivalent to everlasting life. For that moment may be used to bring about perfect reconciliation with an offended God. If, then, a mere moment is fraught with such power for good, what of the advantages that might have been secured to us, had we used our past time well? for we have had many years at our disposal. When we consider that in thirteen years St. Agnes stored up such heroism as enabled her to brave the onset of warlike men, how our feebleness under the assaults of temptation stands rebuked! When we picture the heights of sanctity reached by St. Antony of Padua, St. Aloysius, St. John Berchmans, and St. Stanislaus; and only recently by the "Little Flower," in lives of limited span; how humbled we should feel at our present imperfection. For doubtless some here to-day have spent more years in the cloister than the foregoing saints spent on earth.

The example of countless men and women outside the cloister is, likewise, well calculated to make us blush for our inactivity. How strenuously they guard every moment, and how fruitful—even unto sanctification—is the work many of them do in the passing hours. With most of them time is money; with us time should mean Grace. And if the great majority outside so husband the hours for the gaining of a corruptible crown, should not we guard and employ them for the gaining of a crown that is incorruptible? Believing as we do that the very hairs of our head are numbered, can we doubt that every moment of our lives is registered? "A wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment" (*Eccles.* viii. 5). "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil" (*Eph.* v. 16). For this purpose time is given—*i.e.*, to be used judiciously, for the glory of God, the good of our neighbour, and our own greater sanctification. Time misspent deprives God of much of the glory due to Him; it lessens the quantity and depreciates the quality of our good offices towards others, detracts from the prestige of our Institute, and robs us of many graces which depend on its proper use.

If tempted to complain that we have, after all, so little time, we must silence ourselves by remembering that, in the words of a modern writer, we have all the time there is—*i.e.*, twenty-four hours in each day. We must furthermore reflect that we have enjoyed longer lives than many of the saints. And again, we should consider that we have precisely such a measure of time as our Heavenly Father knows to be sufficient for our salvation and sanctification. If we reasoned less about what we consider the limited quantity of our time, and strove by God's help to put more quality into the labours of the passing hours, our murmurings would give way to joy. We ourselves should perceive that God's blessings are showered down on our strenuous efforts to redeem the time. It was in this spirit that the saints regarded time. Looking on it as one of God's most valuable gifts in the natural order, they were as jealous of each moment as the miser is of his gold. They used each moment to gain spiritual treasure for eternity. Were they writers? We have only to look at their folios to find the truth of our statement. Were they missioners? The countless numbers converted to the Faith proclaim how well the flying hours were used. Were they contemplatives? The graces won for the Church, and the blessings gained by humanity, testify to the good use that was made of the longer or shorter period of time given them by God.

Let us, then, in imitation of those grand and glorious pioneers of the Faith, determine to value more and more this precious gift of time, so that we also, by redeeming it in these "evil days," may produce works worthy of the blessing of God, of the appreciation of our neighbour, and of our call to be His special children.

3. Time, which is measured out as generously to the beggar as to the king, is accompanied by other gifts proceeding from the same bounteous hand. They are not to be bought with gold nor are they attainable by bribes. They are talents given by God to be well used, and are known to us as the three powers of the soul: will, memory, and understanding. Their measure is so utterly dependent on the holy will of God that if there were no other proof but this of man's insufficiency in himself it would be conclusive. "Neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase" (1 *Cor.* iii. 7). Truly, every best gift and every perfect gift is from God. So closely are the gifts we speak of allied to time that the use or abuse of

the one causes the use or abuse of the other. If time is lost, talents are wasted ; and *vice versa.*

Hence we see the folly of burying our talents, and we likewise see the imprudence of losing or not helping to develop talents in others that might have been used for the glory of God. The latter is a thing seldom, if ever, thought of ; but if the man who buried his talent merited condign punishment, how can he escape who occasions such a burial ? There is a lesson here for those who, through favouritism, jealousy, or spite, neglect to allow sufficient scope for the exercise of the talents of those under their care. And a warning is also given to teachers who so neglect their duty as to retard the progress of their pupils. "Hear ye this, O priests, and hearken, O ye house of Israel, and give ear, O house of the king : for there is a judgment against you, because you have been a snare to them whom you should have watched over, and a net spread upon Thabor. And you have turned aside victims into the depth : and I am the teacher of them all" (*Osee* v. 1, 2).

God, the Teacher of all, has vouchsafed to us the powers of will, memory, and understanding that we may be aided in knowing, loving, and serving Him here, so as to be worthy of rejoicing with Him hereafter. They are given, moreover, to enable us to act our part in the holy vocation to which He has called us. Herein lies matter for most serious reflection, if we would make a salutary Retreat. Deplorable mistakes are frequent in the cloister owing to blindness on this very point. Who can enumerate the faults that are committed in the course of the year through the over-rating or the underrating of one's gifts, or through neglect of self-improvement ? Countless acts of disobedience are traceable, less to a spirit of insubordination than to diffidence on the one hand or presumption on the other.

Whereas men of the world make it the business of their lives to fit themselves for the duties to which obedience may call them, many Religious content themselves with saying : "We cannot." They seem to fancy that the statement absolves them from the obligation of trying again and again, with a view to the development of the abilities with which God has endowed them. "Go to the ant, O sluggard, and consider her ways and learn wisdom" (*Prov.* vi. 6). Even granted that their plea is justified by a true estimate of their powers, it cannot be accepted unless supported by proofs that they have taken reasonable pains to improve. The

Curé of Ars, Don Bosco, and scores of others, are examples of what can be done when mediocrity is humbly acknowledged. But the acknowledgment, as in the case of those just mentioned, must be followed by earnest supplications to God; by appeals to Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, and by earnest application to study and work. Only when these means have been adopted can Religious say that they have done their best. And when their best is done, God will be with them, inasmuch and in as far as He wishes them to work for His glory. "Doing what in us lies, God will not deny His Grace." Prudent superiors do not expect all their subjects to be shining lights, but they are upheld by God in expecting all to do their duty. The vocation to the religious life means a disposition to tend to the perfection of one's state, and this disposition can only be proved to exist by the earnestness of the efforts made to strengthen the powers of the soul.

Led by this spirit, a Religious, in having a difficult task allotted to him, may indeed feel diffident; but, like a good soldier of Christ, he will study the position, pray for light and strength, and acquit himself as best he can. If he fails, he will regard the failure as a humiliation in which some special grace is hidden; if he succeeds, he will attribute the success less to his own power than to the generosity of God, the Giver of every good gift.

The most strenuous study and the most devoted work may not lead a Religious beyond the limit of mediocrity in this life; but if continued in God's name they will assuredly help him towards a Kingdom where human standards cease. In Heaven, actions are estimated by the good or bad will with which they are done on earth. Human observers see only the outward act: God sees the heart. St. Bonaventure was mindful of this truth, when he declared to Brother Giles that a poor old washerwoman might merit greater glory than the greatest theologian of the Schools.

When tempted to undervalue our abilities and to bury our talents, let us fear to be misled by secret vanity, wounded pride, jealousy, envy, or spite. These evil dispositions are occasionally responsible for lack of activity in the cloister. Failing to get what they desired, annoyed at the manner in which a duty is imposed, suspicious of some wish to humble them, jealous of interference with their work or their methods, envious of the positions to which their brethren are promoted, some Religious, even early in life, shrink into themselves and refrain from helping their Institute according to their capacity. This is an unholy disposi-

tion. It merits the indignation of Heaven. It recalls to our minds the folly of the man in the parable who buried his talent, and the awful punishment which followed. God forbid that any of us should ever merit such condemnation!

In using our own talents to the best advantage, let us be hearty and spontaneous in paying tributes to the talents of our associates: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (*Ps.* cxxxii. 1). This is the distinguishing mark of truly generous and unselfish souls. It is of indescribable importance for the growth of the Institute and for the encouragement of its members. Progress in virtue does not free a Religious from a longing to hear expressions of goodwill from his brethren. "A brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city" (*Prov.* xviii. 19).

Every true Religious rejoices in the spread of his Order. Hence he welcomes the coming of new members sent by God to fill vacant places and to carry the spirit of the Institute far and wide. The more arduous his own work and the more diligent he has been in its execution, the greater his joy in welcoming newcomers. For he knows that the day for the active use of his own talents is drawing to a close, and the night is fast approaching in which he can no longer work. His daily prayer is that he may retire quietly and gracefully, not coveting labours that are now beyond his mental and physical powers, but glad to think that those labours will be successfully carried on by others now appointed to fill his place. His heart goes out to the young, and they in turn give him their hearts. Thus links are forged which form the chain of monastic traditions.

Let those whom common report singles out as the possessors of exceptional gifts remember that all those gifts come from God. He is justly jealous of His rights. In bestowing remarkable powers He demands exceptional thanks. Therefore, they who are highly favoured are called upon to abase themselves with a generosity of soul equal to the prodigality with which gifts have been showered on them. To act otherwise is to incur the Divine displeasure; for so to act is to attribute to oneself powers and gifts that are, wholly and solely, attributable to Almighty God. In nature, wherever a mountain raises its peak proudly to the sky, we find its complementary in a lowly valley at the base; the crest of the giant wave supposes the trough whose gloomy waters scarcely catch a gleam of light; the loftiest monument has the

deepest base. So should it be in the moral order. Deep humility should preface and follow the successful use of our talents, otherwise there will ever be danger of our being overtaken by some calamity: "Before destruction, the heart of a man is exalted: and before he be glorified, it is humbled" (*Prov.* xviii. 12).

4. All of us are familiar with the saying: "The opportunity makes the man." We may have taken it on trust, without pausing to fathom the depth of its meaning. Yet it deserves attention; for not only does the opportunity make the man, but it makes the saint. It is said to make the man, when its presentment reveals the possession of powers of which even he himself may not have been fully conscious. Thus we hear of people who suddenly make a name for themselves in one or other sphere of study or labour. For years they had plodded on, unknown almost to their nearest neighbours, until something happened which was just the one thing needed to bring them out. Some of the most captivating personalities in history are made known to us through the seizure of some great opportunity—*e.g.*, Florence Nightingale and Grace Darling, to mention but two out of scores of examples in secular history.

Turning to Sacred Scripture, we read that the boasting and swaggering of Goliath, on the one hand, and the timidity of the Israelites on the other, presented a golden opportunity to the boy David, which he gladly seized. *It made him.* Judith became the heroine of her race through her swift decision to rid it of an oppressor. David, later on in life—unmade by sin—became even greater than he had been, by turning to good account the chidings of the prophet Nathan. The opportunity made him the exemplar of all true penitents. Mary Magdalene knew the hour of her visitation, and thus became the penitent of the New Law. SS. Peter and Paul availed themselves of the opportunities put in their way by the Lord of mercy. The one went out and cried bitterly: the other implored: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Judas and the impenitent thief, alas! like Jerusalem the city, knew not the day of their visitation, and have consequently left to the world terrible examples of the folly of rejecting the gifts of God that are bound up with opportunities of repentance. "And when he drew near, seeing the city, he wept over it, saying: If thou also hadst known, and that in this thy day, the things that are to thy peace: but now they are hidden from thy eyes. For the

days shall come upon thee: and thy enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and straiten thee on every side, and beat thee flat to the ground, and thy children who are in thee: and they shall not leave in thee a stone upon a stone: because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation" (*St. Luke* xix. 41-44).

All who have sanctified themselves knew the time of their visitation. They seized it as a Heaven-sent opportunity. By the grace of God it made them saints. Every epoch supplies its own testimony. In times of persecution, the martyrs found their opportunity. Lands that lay in darkness offered opportunities for intrepid missioners. Periods of spiritual torpor proved so many opportunities for long-expected reformers. Trials, temptations, and opposition, to which men—in the mass—succumbed, proved golden opportunities for those called unto sanctification. This is especially verified in the lives of men and women who may be called epoch-making saints. Many names occur at once to the mind: St. Augustine, St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Clare, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Ignatius, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Teresa, and St. John of the Cross. In the epochs in which they lived they braved the adverse currents that were carrying thousands to destruction. That they were saved, and that they led others into safety, was due to the fact that they were alive to the time of their visitation. Had they missed their opportunity, they would have gone the way of all flesh. They appraised the gifts of God at their true value. Time, talents, and opportunities were all thrown zealously into the service of the Giver of every good gift. They became good soldiers of Christ. The opportunity made them saints of God.

Day after day opportunities are presented to us which, if welcomed and availed of, would help us towards perfection. Most of them are of the nature of the little things mentioned in Scripture. But, although little, they are by no means to be neglected. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in that which is greater: and he that is unjust in that which is little is unjust also in that which is greater" (*St. Luke* xvi. 10).

Consider the many occasions, in community life, in which we are secretly invited by Almighty God to exercise patience, charity, generosity, sympathy, mortification, silence, and self-denial. Think also of the many incentives we have to pray and to be rapt in God. Nowhere in the world are opportunities for self-repression more

abundant, for nowhere else are to be found so many individuals voluntarily chained to the same spot, or made lifelong witnesses of each other's idiosyncrasies. And we may search the whole world and fail to discover so many golden opportunities of drawing nearer and nearer to God. Short of turning all those opportunities to immediate profit, our lives might become a round of misery —which God forbid! Turned to profit, they, by the grace of God, sanctify us. On the one hand, our convents become beehives of industry, and on the other schools of sanctity.

Let us be deeply impressed with the fact that, unless we are keenly alive to the opportunities that are daily within our reach, we shall be found wanting when great efforts are demanded of us. In ordinary life the opportunity makes one man rather than another, because the former is always at his ordinary post, wakeful and alert. By the time the dullard awakes, the golden opportunity has gone—perhaps never to return. So, in the spiritual life, if we would be prepared for great eventualities we must accustom ourselves to the minor events that are bound up with our daily activities. "And we know that to them that love God, all things work together unto good, to such as according to his purpose are called to be saints" (*Rom.* viii. 28).

We should be especially solicitous in seizing every opportunity that helps towards self-conquest. The seeming triviality of the occasion should not deter us, for it is only by steady practice that we can hope to be wakeful and valorous, when the time comes for the exercise of heroism. If such an hour awaits us we may rest assured that God, the Giver of every good gift, will be with us to perfect the work that we have uniformly done for the glory of His Name. Time, talents, and opportunities, used for His honour in our daily conflicts, will prove instruments for the accomplishment of even greater things if, in His Providence, we are destined to be chosen for deeds similar in their nature to the splendid deeds performed by the saints.

IV.—VENI, LUMEN CORDIUM

(Come, fill our hearts with love.)

1. WITH profound humility we have besought the Holy Ghost to enlighten our minds, to enkindle our hearts, and to purify our souls; for without light from on high we are in semi-darkness, and cannot see above the level of our fallen nature, nor beyond its limits. Although the Apostle (*Rom.* i. 20) tells us that "the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: his eternal power also and divinity," yet that light is as the light of the dawn compared with the noonday brightness that we long for. Unless our hearts are enkindled with Divine fire we cannot rejoice in heavenly things—the only things that really matter—nor can we have a burning desire for their possession. For temporal things are so very near to us that they absorb our attention and captivate our senses. And without being mercifully visited by the Holy Spirit, and moved by His unction to see ourselves as we really are, we have neither the wish nor the will, nor have we the power, to cleanse our souls of their stains. The Holy Spirit is the mirror in which we behold our sordidness. "And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment" (*St. John* xvi. 8).

Our hopes of conversion from sin and of growth and perseverance in goodness are built on the Divine response to our prayer. We have already been made conscious of our innate poverty and, at the same time, of the richness of our store, through the bounty of our Heavenly Father and the merits of His Divine Son. We most readily and gratefully acknowledge that from the moment of our birth, and notably from the hour of our Baptism, the blessings showered on us have been as great as they have been abundant. Some of those blessings have been pondered over in the preceding meditation. In due season others will present themselves for our consideration, but we must pause now to reflect on our best and greatest gift—the gift of Divine Love. It is greater than Faith; for although Faith enables us to see beyond the limits occasioned by the Original Fall, we nevertheless see but dimly as through a glass. It is greater than Hope; for while our hope gives us a claim to Divine things, the possession is deferred. The gift of Love, however, unites us, even here below, to God the Author of

our being and the Source of all the felicity we now enjoy or that we look forward to. The union, although so imperfect as compared with what awaits us in Glory, is yet so appealing as to make us long more and more for its perfect fruition. In this spirit we cry: "Veni, Lumen Cordium (Come, fill our hearts with love). Be a light, not only to our eyes by Faith, not only to our feet by Hope, but to our hearts by Love." For without Love all other gifts are practically valueless : inert as the parts of a machine without its motor power. Love is the impelling force which alone can enable us to glide safely along the earth and then soar to lofty heights. It is Love that enables us to distinguish spiritual friends from foes, and to outdistance all who strive to lead us captive. Thus it is that for the thoughtful Religious there is nothing more saddening than the contemplation of the world, void as it is of the love of God. Looking out on it, he realizes with St. John (1 *Ep.* i. 16) that "all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world."

2. As it comes from the hand of the Creator, the world is wonderfully fair. It inspires the poet, entrances the artist, and provides countless themes for the contemplation of the saint. It is the home of myriads of creatures whose varied endowments point to the infinite power of God and reveal the wondrous beauty of His eternal mind. It is the resting-place of man on his pilgrimage to the bourne whence there is no return. As a resting-place, its enchantments suggest that those beyond the bourne are incomparably greater—its trials and dangers point to the folly of undue attachment, for "we have not here a lasting city, we seek one that is above." Regarded thus, we find the world reflecting the goodness and the love of God. Primarily for His own glory, and secondarily out of the love He bore the human race, He drew out of original nothingness all the things that are, and He clothed them with surpassing splendour. Through the ages, His works have awakened the genius of poets and painters, and inspired the inventiveness that enables man to emulate the Divine Artificer in everything short of creation.

And yet, looking out on the world, the spiritual man grows sad. He looks for hearty responsiveness on the part of rational beings, and finds coldness instead. He looks for goodness : he looks for love. Alas ! he too often finds both conspicuous by

their absence. And yet, surely Goodness calls for goodness, and Love for love, even as a voice calls for its echo! While mountain and valley, the hill and the dale; the star-jewelled sky and the impenetrable deep; the giants of the forest and the flowerets of the glade; creatures on the wing and those that tread the earth: all join in ceaseless *Te Deums* to the God of Majesty: man, the "Lord of Creation," remains almost dumb. Mute nature loves, because it instinctively does the will of the Creator. Man—created to love, to serve, and to adore—he is the only creature who exclaims: "I will not serve!" Service is the test of love. "He that hath my commandments and keepeth them: he it is that loveth me" (*St. John* xiv. 21). "He that loveth me not, keepeth not my word" (*Ibid.* 24). Where there is no loyal service, there is no love. And thus it is that the thoughtful Religious is saddened to the depths of his soul: for he realizes that the lack of love is due to the lack of thought and right understanding: "With desolation is all the land made desolate, because there is no one that considereth in the heart" (*Jer.* xi. 11). "And man when he was in honour did not understand: he is compared to senseless beasts and is become like unto them" (*Ps.* xlviii. 13). His sadness is in perfect harmony with the mind of God, for it is written: "I have brought up children and exalted them, but they have despised me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood" (*Isa.* i. 2, 3).

This mental dulness is the source of all sin. Morally speaking, it changes the beautiful world into a desert waste, for neither its worth nor its beauty is availed of to move the heart to gratitude or uplift the soul in adoration. Although the world is so full of activities, almost all of them circle round interests that are purely material. And man, raised up by God to tower above the lower creation, abases himself by the depth of his ingratitude, and makes his splendid reason of less practical value than the instinct of the brutes. No wonder, then, that the saints wept over this strange aberration of judgment. "O Love not known—O Love not loved!" cried the seraphic St. Francis, as he roved through the woods bewailing the lack of love in the world. In all ages grief thus induced is the most luminous sign of the call to sanctity, for it indicates heartfelt solicitude for the glory and honour of God, and a burning desire for the acknowledgment of His Goodness and His Love. This is the very essence of the practical love of God.

Happy we, if we find ourselves influenced and moved by a similar spirit. It will testify that although we are in the world, we are not of the world. It will enable us to understand the Mystery of Calvary. It will kill within us the selfish spirit and enliven the spirit of sacrifice. Unless we grieve over the want of Divine love in the world, we cannot hope for a truly apostolic spirit, nor can we grow in the spirit of prayer and penance; for it is the contemplation of worldly woe that fires the zeal of the apostle: and the study of the blindness and frailty of men quickens within us the spirit of prayer and leads us to apply the scourge of penance. Short of such wholesome discipline we rightly fear that we also may become castaways.

3. The human soul without Divine Love is a ship without a rudder, and without a miracle of grace can never reach port. Its faith may be a true compass; hope may fill the sails; but if it be not properly guided by love, then adverse winds and treacherous currents will drive the soul far, far from the haven for which it was chartered. Theologians tell us that love is the only virtue to which, *per se*, justification and salvation are annexed. "Love is the fulfilling of the law" (*Rom.* xiii. 10). "The charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost who is given to us" (*Rom.* v. 5). It is, according to St. Augustine, "the life of virtues" (*De laudibus caritatis*). St. Thomas (II.-II., Q. xxiii., A. 8) calls it "the form of virtues." "God is charity: and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him. . . . Perfect charity casteth out fear" (1 *St. John* iv. 16, 18). "Let us therefore love God, because God hath first loved us" (*Ibid.* v. 19). "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (*Jer.* xxxi. 3). Moved by these considerations, all the saints hungered and thirsted after Divine Love, and, consequently, separated themselves from votaries of the world, whose coldness and thoughtlessness they so deeply deplored. The ardour of their search was manifested by their fidelity in observing the Divine commands, and by their scrupulous exactitude in performing the duties of their state. Love, to them, was not an empty name, but a stern reality involving servitude and sacrifice, for the words of Christ were ever present to their minds: "If you keep my commandments you shall abide in my love; as I also have kept my Father's commandments and do abide in his love" (*St. John* xv. 10). "You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you" (*Ibid.* 14).

They applied themselves with such zest to the practice of this Divine virtue that each could say with humility and truth: "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up" (*St. John* ii. 17); and by one and all the injunction of the Canticle was literally fulfilled: "Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm, for love is strong as death" (*Cant.* viii. 8).

The motive that impelled them was the Divine Goodness. Human as they were, they could not exclude from their minds the idea of a reward. But the hope of a reward was the thing least thought of when their souls were lifted up to God in fervent acts of love. They loved Him for Himself: for His Divine Goodness taken absolutely. It was the principle and the goal of their perfection. "Charity never falleth away" (1 *Cor.* xiii. 8). For Divine Love here below differs not in kind, but only in degree from the Glory hereafter. With souls uplifted and hearts all aglow, with their minds illumined and their will resolute and strong, they cried out with St. Paul (*Rom.* viii. 36-39): "Who, then, shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or the sword? . . . But in all these things we overcome because of him that hath loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The knowledge that at least some few men and women in every age have been true lovers of God, is balm to the souls that are wounded by the outlook on the desert wastes of the world. No century has been without its saints, no Christian nation is without its time-honoured shrines of prayer and penance. And so they who were at first sad and discouraged rise full of hope. They feel that there is still hope for the world, and that there is hope for themselves: hope for the world because of the elect; hope for themselves through the glorious examples of love set down for them in historic pages.

4. The first step towards love is knowledge. We were taught this when we were mere children. Should we live for a thousand years, the formula then committed to memory would hold good—*i.e.*, that we have been created "to know, love, and serve God in this world, and to be happy with Him for ever in

the next." Thus the first step towards love and service is knowledge. St. Augustine, when he had long outgrown the years of childhood, cried out: "O God, that I may know Thee! Oh, that I may know myself!" For no one can be loved unless his good qualities are known, and no one can be served by the free until his claims to service are acknowledged.

As God is infinite in all perfections, the devout soul finds itself ever at His feet in the attitude of a humble disciple.* It knows and feels that, no matter how copiously it drinks from the fountain of Divine Knowledge, this fountain can never be exhausted. Such a soul never becomes self-sufficient. The higher it ascends the gradient of knowledge, the more it becomes conscious of the depths of its ignorance. While the worldling makes his superficial knowledge of the forces of nature a pretext for denying the existence of God, the thoughtful Religious sees in all those forces so many indications of the existence of a Prime Mover. While the worldling is satisfied with the things of earth as children are satisfied with toys, the man of God regards them as the shadowings of greater things to come, and his soul is in a state of unrest so long as his sojourn is prolonged. With St. Augustine, he cries: "I have been created for Thee, O my God, and never shall I rest until I find my repose in Thee." He regards all knowledge as inane, unless it leads to God. The devils know and tremble. Cultivated for its own sake, knowledge is a will-o'-the-wisp, that lures the soul to destruction in the quagmire of sensuality or the snares of pride and self-conceit. Regarded as a means and cultivated under the wings of the Holy Spirit of God, knowledge leads to seraphic love and to loyal service. "Blessed is the man whom thou shalt instruct, O Lord, and shall teach him out of thy law" (*Ps.* xciii. 12). Pursued thus, the soul gathers that God is lovable and that He is loving. He is lovable in all the works of His hands. He is lovable in Himself. He is lovable in his Divine attributes. His works testify to design, skill, order, harmony, beauty, and utility. "Heaven is my throne; and earth is my footstool" (*Isa.* lxvi. 1). As Dr. William Barry beautifully says: "Seen with purged eyes, nature is already the Kingdom of God."

Forgetting these things, many Religious are themselves responsible for the barrenness of their meditations, and for the

* "They that approach to his feet shall receive of his doctrine" (*Deut.* xxxiii. 3.)

consequent slowness of the growth of the love of God in their souls. Neglecting the tangible matter provided by God for frequent meditation, they wander in dreamland and gather no fruit. To learn the science of the love of God we must begin with the alphabet of the book of Nature. For the alphabet, no less than the highest phase of mysticism, is God's contribution to the system of Divine love. "Thou thyself, O Lord, alone, thou hast made heaven and the heaven of heavens and all the host thereof: the earth, and all things that are in it: the seas and all that are therein: and thou givest life to all these things, and the host of heaven adoreth thee" (2 *Esdras* ix. 8). "The heavens show forth the glory of God and the firmament declareth the work of his hands" (*Ps.* xviii. 2). "That which God has cleansed do not thou call common" (*Acts* x. 14).

From the visible proofs of the lovableness of God found in all the works of nature, the ascent to the supernatural is short and easy. Almost unbidden, we find words rising to our lips in praise of the Divine attributes. The Lord is lovable in His Infinite and Eternal Wisdom, in His Providence and His Mercy, in His Power and in His Patience, in His Truth and Justice, in His Goodness and His Magnanimity.

The more our hearts dilate with gratitude as we contemplate the Divine attributes, the more generously the Holy Spirit blesses us with light to see into the dark recesses of our souls. We, to our dismay, become conscious of the fact that for years we were cold and indifferent in His service, and almost blind to the existence of His infinite perfection. Humbled to the dust, we discover that we were really like the worldlings whose blindness and ingratitude we have deplored. We now turn our indignation against ourselves, saying, "Oh, how cold we have been in the service of so generous a Master, and how little we have loved Him who is infinitely and eternally lovable. How we have wasted the years granted us, how we have misapplied our energies, how we have run after shadows and abandoned the substance. Forgive, O God, our base ingratitude; pardon our lack of love. Deign to give us the grace to keep the resolution we now form to dwell more frequently on Thy lovableness and Thy infinite goodness, so as to be induced to return love for love, and to render generous service like the heroic labours of the saints who have gone before us."

5. Not only is God lovable, but He is loving; "For thou lovest all things that are, and hatest none of the things which thou

hast made: for thou didst not appoint, or make anything, hating it" (*Wisd.* ix. 25). "Can a woman forget her infant . . . and if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee" (*Isa.* xlvi. 4). Here, indeed, is comfort for all who feel that they are thrust out from the hearts of others. Here is a sure remedy for those who are too much drawn to creatures. Some pine away through want of love, and others are consumed by love's fury; but without reflecting constantly on the eternal and infinite love of God, both classes might be in grave danger. The former might lapse into melancholy; the latter might wake up—at the close of life—to the realization that all their works were without supernatural merit, because done to please the creature rather than the Creator. These dangers will be averted, if our love of God be fanned into flame by the abiding thought that He hath first loved us: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore have I drawn thee, taking pity on thee" (*Jer.* xxxi. 3). "I will draw thee with the bonds of Adam, with the bonds of love" (*Osee* xi. 3).

When we reflect that, from all eternity, we were in the mind of God, and that His foreknowledge of our existence was synonymous with His love for us, we can well afford to be indifferent to the attitude of those around us. To be esteemed and loved by others is, indeed, gratifying to the human soul; but the purest and deepest human love is only a faint reflex of the love borne for us by Almighty God. That Religious, then, is to be pitied who is ever seeking notice and marks of approval, and who lapses into melancholy when those around seem cold and unloving. She fails to see that God is visiting her with a very special grace. He wishes her to be impressed with the fact that He alone is her exceeding great reward. He awaits her co-operation with that grace. If she be responsive to the Divine attraction, she will, in the fulness of the light now accorded, behold the dangers that lay before her, had human love been lavishly bestowed.

Remembrance of the eternal love of God should restrain those who would exhaust their love on their neighbours and leave nothing for their Supreme Lord and Master. It is a great betrayal. It could never be if they fortified themselves by reflections on the Incarnation and Redemption. Who that dwells on the self-sacrificing love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, could ever be so ungrateful as to lavish love on the creature, and leave the Divine Source of all love out in the cold? The Incarnate God has ever

been stretching out His hands in earnest pleading for love in return for love: "My son, give me thy heart" (*Prov.* xxiii. 26). Who can refuse? As a babe in Bethlehem He loved us, and the flame of love grew more and more manifest with the passing years. "And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age, and grace with God and men" (*St. Luke* ii. 52). His love of us increased His desire for suffering, inflamed His Sacred Heart with missionary zeal, deepened His spirit of prayer, and finally consumed Him on Calvary: "It is consummated!" The work of Redemption is completed, but the fruits of Redemption are inexhaustible. They surround us. They are ever within our reach. They are proofs—tangible, powerful, unmistakable proofs—of the reality of the love of God. God is loving! He is loving in the Holy Mass. He is loving in the Sacraments. In the words of the prophet, Jeremias, He is ever drawing us—taking pity on us. This Retreat is a fresh mark of His love; for whereas others have been taken, we have been left to repair our past neglect, and to become willing victims of love. Oh, let us suffer ourselves to be drawn with the bands of Divine love, and then all outside of God will appear in its true perspective. No creature will ever more be powerful enough to drag us from the pathway leading to God. He Himself will be the supreme attraction. He will be our all. "My God and my all," exclaimed the seraphic St. Francis. "By this hath the charity of God appeared in us, because God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we may live by him. In this is charity: not as though we had loved God, but because he hath first loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins" (1 *St. John* iv. 9, 10). "For the Father himself loveth you" (*St. John* xvi. 26). "Behold what manner of charity the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be the sons of God" (1 *St. John* iii. 1).

6. Once the soul realizes thoroughly that God is lovable and loving, and that He is the portion of its inheritance, with great alacrity it ascends the steps that lead to His throne, nor will it rest until it hears the words crowning it with bliss: "Well done, good and faithful servant" (*St. Matt.* xxv. 21). Repeated acts of love, and deeds to prove the reality of those acts, will, through the merits of Christ, win for that soul grace after grace. Day by day, and hour by hour, it will become more and more ripe for union with its Divine Master; and union with Him is the substance, and the

end of Theological Love. It will be found saying: I would suffer all things rather than mortally offend. Nay, I would suffer all things rather than venially offend. But even this, O my God, does not satisfy my heart's desire. Rather let me say, I mean ever to choose what—to Thee—may be the most acceptable. Slowly it may be, but surely, the soul will realize the sweets of God's friendship. "God is charity: and he that abideth in charity abideth in God, and God in him" (1 *St. John* iv. 16). "Perfect charity casteth out fear" (*Ibid.* v. 18). On the part of the soul, the chief factor in this friendship is loyalty and constancy: "I live now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (*Gal.* ii. 20). "The charity of Christ urgeth us" (2 *Cor.* v. 14). "I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ" (*Phil.* i. 23). On the part of God, the friendship means the ineffable gift of the grace of final perseverance.

This blissful union produces fruits that cannot be hidden. "Where thy treasure is, there also is thy heart" (*St. Matt.* vi. 21). The loving soul delights in speaking of God and Divine things. It is the essence of reverence. "He who is of God hears the word of God" (*St. John* viii. 47). Through sheer love it keeps the commandments of God, yet filial fear is never absent. "If you love me keep my commandments" (*St. John* xi. 15). "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole man" (*Eccles.* xii. 13). The soul that loves lives ever under the eye of the great Beloved, and in its outlook sees all things through God. This is, largely, the secret of its constancy. "Charity never falleth away" (1 *Cor.* xiii. 8). "If our heart does not reprehend us, we have confidence towards God" (1 *St. John* iii. 21). For God will not be outdone in generosity: "And whatsoever we shall ask, we shall receive of him: because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight" (*Ibid.* v. 22).

How calmly such a soul awaits the summons! Filled with love by the Holy Spirit of God, it regards that summons as merely the rending of a veil through which it has always seen the object of its desires. That vision, though dim, made all the outside world seem blank as compared with the great realities beyond. Those realities the soul now enjoys without fear or dread of ever more losing them.

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V.—CONSOLATOR OPTIME

(O Thou, of comforters the best.)

1. CARDINAL NEWMAN somewhere says that if the history of suffering were written, it would be the most interesting book in the world. None of us are likely to attempt the work, but all of us could supply matter for at least some of its chapters; for, as far back as we can remember, we have shared the common lot by suffering in mind and body. Our bodies may not be marked with scars, but in our minds are indelible memories that make us wonder, now and then, how we are alive to tell the tale.

When sane men speak of things infinitely great they cannot possibly exaggerate, for the finite mind cannot outspan the infinite; and so what they say about the bliss of Heaven or the horror of Hell can never equal the reality. It is almost similar with regard to human sufferings, finite though they are. In speaking of them it is hardly possible for men to use the language of exaggeration. Sufferings are so varied and so widespread; they are so incisive and so deep; so insidious and so haunting; so excruciating and, sometimes, so humbling and degrading; they are occasionally so bewildering and maddening, that finite words are all too limited to embrace their vast proportions. They are like the tentacles of some huge monster set in the centre of the earth, holding in their grip literally all the members of the human family. Those tentacles find their way unerringly to the summit of the loftiest height and to the bottom of the most profound abyss; they spread over seas and plunge into their depths; they grope their way through tangled woods and cross vast deserts. No place is sacred, so long as it serves as a resting-place for the foot of man, for the rôle marked out for suffering is to touch and to try every living being born into the world. No one has ever yet escaped. No one born of woman can ever hope to escape. "Man born of a woman, living for a short time, is filled with many miseries. Who cometh forth like a flower, and is destroyed, and fleeth as a shadow, and never continueth in the same state" (*Job* xiv. 1, 2). The fairest human flower that ever bloomed, Mary our sweetest Mother, was so sharply smitten by suffering that we call her the "Mother of Sorrows"; "And thine own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be

revealed" (*St. Luke* ii. 35). Jesus, her Divine Son, was stricken—so terribly stricken that He cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (*St. Matt.* xxvii. 46); and we know Him as the "Man of Sorrows."

For the believer the existence of suffering presents no insuperable difficulty. Its origin is written large and clear in the Book of Life: "And the Lord God said to the serpent: I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed. . . . To the woman also he said: I will multiply thy sorrows, and thy conceptions, in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee. And to Adam he said: Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herbs of the earth. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return" (*Gen.* iii. 14-19).

In these words the believer finds sufficient explanation of the ills that human flesh is heir to. Trials of mind and body, sometimes so terrible as to paralyze attempts at description; world-wide disturbances through epidemics, famine, and wars, shake not his faith. Relying on the Inspired Word, he regards those calamities—as the fruits of original sin—part of the curse put on the earth and on man. In our pride we would wish it were otherwise, and sometimes that pride leads us to kick against the goad, with the result that our sufferings are greatly increased. If we humbly yet courageously accept the inevitable, we shall find them powerful aids to self-conquest, self-reliance, and final victory. If, instead of murmuring, craving for sympathy, and striving to evade them, we sturdily faced our sufferings or patiently accepted them, how different would be our lives! How much nearer to Jesus and Mary we should be in our joys, if we were as patient in our sufferings as they!

The value of suffering is seen in the history of every nation that still bears some trace of the Divine seal, and in the life of every man in whom there is any evidence of real nobility. The Divine seal on a nation is seen in its adherence to the Faith: real nobility in a man is proved by his pursuit of virtue. Neither

the one nor the other can be kept intact in this world of woe unless the nation and the man pass through the fire of suffering. That fire consumes the chaff of instability and preserves the seal of fidelity. It is the grandest spectacle in creation to find nations and men facing that fire with undaunted brows and intrepid hearts. They come out of it ennobled; whereas nations and men who shrink from it become, in the one case, apostate, and, in the other, spiritually decadent. Let a man be pointed out who has not suffered, or who has not been ready to face suffering for justice' sake, and he will infallibly be found narrow-minded, selfish, churlish, and unsympathetic; he will be void of resourcefulness, destitute of initiative, and incapable of endurance.

Heaven is ever looking down on us to see how we bear our sufferings, just as spectators look on athletes to see how they bear the strain of opposition. In Gethsemane, Angels looked on, not to lessen the sufferings of our beloved Saviour, but to comfort Him. They looked on Mary, not to draw the sword of sorrow from her heart, but to compassionate her. They looked on the martyrs, not in all cases to moderate the fierceness of the flames, but to put the *Te Deum* on their lips. And so shall they look on all who are convinced that no good of any kind, be it in the physical or the moral order, can be accomplished without suffering or resistance. And resistance to foes, within or without, is sometimes the most refined and agonizing form of suffering. Truly the lessons of suffering are hard to learn, but the results in the physical order mean firmness of muscle and strength of nerve; in the moral order, patience, confidence, power, compassion, perseverance, and victory.

2. It is of faith that the human race is beset with powerful, intelligent, spiritual, personal foes, whose cunning has been deepened by centuries of experience, and whose power, though limited since the coming of Christ, is quite beyond our comprehension. So, on this score also, we must be prepared for sufferings that will often tax our greatest powers of endurance: "Brethren, be sober and watch, for your adversary the devil goeth about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, whom resist ye, strong in the faith" (1 *St. Pet.* v. 8, 9). "Put ye on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the deceits of the devil. For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but

against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places" (*Eph.* vi. 11, 12). It is, moreover, a certainty of faith that the demons, when permitted by God, afflict not only the souls of men, but infest also their bodies: "So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with a very grievous ulcer, from the sole of the foot even to the top of the head" (*Job* ii. 7). "And he sent upon them [the Egyptians] the wrath of his indignation: indignation and wrath, and trouble, which he sent by evil angels" (*Ps.* lxxvii. 49).

Well may we tremble at the prospect of such antagonism! But anxiety need not, should not, be identical with cowardice. The bravest warriors tremble in facing opponents when great issues are at stake; but they fear not. Neither should we fear to contemplate the endless panorama of suffering, originating in the fall of man, and increased in succeeding ages by the actual sins of those who imitated our first parents, rather in their disobedience than in their original fidelity. Let us fear not the demons ever present on the tragic stage of human woe. Let us fear not men in their varying moods, no matter how we may be tortured by their inconsistency, their injustice, cruelty, jealousy, or hatred. Neither let us fear our own personal sufferings, even though we are racked by scruples, temptations, weariness, or physical pain. But remembering that all those evils, directly or indirectly, are the woeful results of sin, let us fear the great God who, in permitting them, shows His hatred of that solitary evil: "Fear ye not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him that can destroy both soul and body into hell" (*St. Matt.* x. 28).

Convinced that one's view of suffering makes or unmakes the spiritual man, let us fear to offend God by allowing our sufferings to blind us to His infinite pity and compassion, for by so doing, we may run the risk of lapsing into the unpardonable sin of despair. Let us fear to sever ourselves from the long line of saintly sufferers who have gone before us. They, on the one hand, bore their trials to expiate the debt of temporal punishment due to sin, and on the other, to enrich their souls with graces through the mingling of their tears, blood, and sweat, with the tears, blood, and sweat of Jesus Christ, our beloved Saviour. In one word, the deeper our hatred of sin, and the greater our longing for grace and

for glory, the more prompt and the more generous will be our acceptance of the sufferings God may send or permit. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us" (*Rom.* viii. 18). "Knowing that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so shall you be also of the consolation" (2 *Cor.* i. 7). "But if you partake of the sufferings of Christ, rejoice that when his glory shall be revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy" (1 *St. Pet.* iv. 13). 'For unto this are you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example that you should follow his steps" (1 *St. Pet.* ii. 21). These words sustained the martyrs at the stake and on the rack, in the darkness of the dungeon and in the face of their accusers.

The martyrs made these words their own, and from the depths of their hearts they thus paraphrased them with their dying lips: "O Lord! either to suffer or to die!" Sufferings gladly accepted and patiently borne *made* the Saints; for the more they suffered the more heroic was their courage. God forbid that they should *unmake* us through a puerile fear!

3. Profitable as it is to consider how suffering holds us in its grip, it would be a fatal mistake to think that the grip is never relaxed. It is to be feared that not a few spiritual people do make that mistake, and perhaps we, in greater or lesser degree, are among the number. Who has not heard of the religious pessimist? That sombre individual whose outlook on life is altogether miserable, and who seems to be qualifying to become a modern Jeremiah: a Jeremiah whose lamentations will be void of the hopeful notes intoned by the ancient prophet. This person sees only the pain of suffering, but is blind to the many compensations that either accompany it or follow it closely.

If we took pains to balance the respective totals of suffering and consolation in our lives, we should find the former heavily outweighed by the latter. Nay, we should find that God invariably uses suffering, rightly borne, to be a medium for some spiritual or temporal benefit that could not otherwise reach us. "Whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth" (*Prov.* iii. 11). "As silver is tried by fire and gold in the furnace, so the Lord trieth the hearts" (*Prov.* xvii. 3). "Many are the tribulations of the just, but out of them all will the Lord deliver them" (*Ps.* xxxiii. 10). "And

all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 *Tim.* iii. 12).

We should never forget that God is our Father, and that in permitting suffering He is simply exercising us in patience, fortitude, and humility, and is longing to foster in us the Christ-like virtues of sympathy and compassion. These virtues, the special portion of heroic souls, can never be perfect except through the searching fire of suffering. "But, esteeming these very punishments to be less than our sins deserve, let us believe that these scourges of the Lord, with which like servants we are chastised, have happened for our amendment, and not for our destruction" (*Judith* viii. 27). "But we glory also in tribulations, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, and patience trial; and trial hope; and hope confoundeth not: because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us" (*Rom.* v. 3-5).

Can we not recall to mind many instances in which we had startling proof of the truth of the foregoing words? Does not memory, which recalls past sufferings, also bring back to us compensations which came often from unexpected sources and in ways almost miraculous? When we were humbled, was not light thrown on some dark corner of the soul wherein the germs of pride had hitherto, all unconsciously, been nourished? When our work or our place of abode was changed to our disadvantage (as we thought), did not the fresh duty or the new outlook bring with it greater scope for Christ-like labour? When torn away from the side or out of the hearts of those we loved, or who dearly loved us, did we not find easier access to the Sacred Heart of Jesus? Perhaps that Heart had hitherto sought our heart in vain, until, from the depths of our loneliness, we saw that no other heart could solidly comfort our own.

Such questionings might be prolonged indefinitely, but enough has been said to convince us that grave injustice would be done to God, our tender and compassionate Father, if we persisted in thinking that our sufferings are out of all proportion to our consolations. Let one further reflection suffice: when we consider that our many sins have rendered us fit only for Hell-fire, and that, nevertheless, God in His mercy has called us to the cloister, the very ante-room of Heaven, who will dare to say that only sufferings are his or her lot? Oh, let us, with deep respect and gratitude,

kiss the Divine hand that punishes, assured as we are that the hand which uses the rod is also the hand which scatters, to all the confines of the earth, blessings untold.

4. While some souls, as we have just seen, are insensible to the comforts which God invariably sends in the train of sufferings, others in bidding them welcome are unmindful of the source from which they come. They either forget the giver in the gift, or they attribute the gift to the person who bestows it, forgetting that he is but the delegate of the all-bountiful God.

One of the most striking proofs of God's bountifulness is His abundantly expressed wish that the desolate of heart should be consoled, the needy provided for, the diffident encouraged, and that the fallen should be raised up. Holy Scripture is constantly enjoining the alleviation of human misery, and is stored with promises of blessings, here and hereafter, to those who imitate the providence of the Heavenly Father in these respects. "Blessed is he that understandeth concerning the needy and the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the evil day" (*Ps.* xli. 1). Ardently wishing His children to be comforted, God seals that wish by planting in some hearts a deep parental instinct, and in the hearts of others a feeling of sympathy and compassion. To one He gives great insight into the human heart, and to another such magnetic power as enables him to lift the miserable out of the deepest pit of woe. Here He raises up a soul that is a rock of patience, and there another who moves about as an angel of peace, stilling the most turbulent waves of passion. But in all this He wishes us to be under no delusion. He would have us understand that *He*, first and last, must be regarded as the Giver. Trusting to our sense of gratitude, He takes it for granted that we shall regard our earthly benefactors as His messengers and not as His rivals.

And yet, even in the cloister, how deluded some souls may be! Discovering what is called "a kindred spirit," "a *real* mother," "a Heaven-sent director," "the only consoler of a lifetime," "the only one who understands me," God, of all comforters the best, becomes wellnigh forgotten. The giver is forgotten in the gift, or God is forgotten in His delegate. Oh, what an insult to the Divine consoler! What a betrayal of the trust reposed in us! We wonder not at senseless babes forgetting the mother in the

nurse, nor at selfish children forgetting the giver in the gift; but that such ingratitude should live in those of maturer age is, surely, proof that they do not meditate in the heart. That any human consoler should so fill the eye as to blind one to the Consoler all Divine; that a Religious should so cling to a particular friend as to loosen her hold on God; that she should profess to be under "special direction" all the while that she transgresses, without compunction, the simplest rules; that one should be found pining away and burying herself in melancholy, because some human consoler has died: surely such conduct is calculated to provoke the anger of God. And that God *is* angry at such conduct is manifest from what is set down in Holy Scripture: "Can the blind lead the blind? Do they not both fall into the ditch?" (*St. Luke* vi. 39). "For my people have done two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (*Jer.* ii. 13).

In welcoming all the comforts that our neighbours bring, we must never forget that the powers of the creature are limited; that man is prone to inconstancy; that it is the rarest thing in life to be able so to reveal our inner soul as to be perfectly understood by others; that, even when we *are* understood, no creature can supply all that our soul hungers for—all that our soul needs. What folly, then, to shut out from ourselves the only Being who really understands our misery: the only Being who can fully comfort us! "I am thy reward exceeding great" (*Gen.* xvi. 1). "Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (*St. Matt.* xi. 28). "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, thy comforts have given joy to my soul" (*Ps.* xciii. 19). "Who comforteth us *in all our tribulations*" (2 *Cor.* i. 4). That God is the only Being who can adequately comfort us according to our needs is evident, because He alone is Omniscient, Absolute, Almighty, and Eternal. Creatures, on the other hand, have but limited vision; they are dependent, fickle, restricted in power, and are mortal. True, when their wills are in harmony with the will of God, they pass on to us the messages of comfort that God condescends to send, but they must never be allowed to usurp the office of the Divine Consoler.

To comfort us He became Incarnate, and to continue the work He stays with us in the Blessed Sacrament. Oh, how well He

knows our needs; how deeply He commiserates our sorrows; how keenly He longs to help us! Let the parables, the history of His miracles, the record of His mercies in dealing with the outcast and the sorrowing, encourage us to fly to Him in all our trials. Let us invoke the Holy Spirit on such occasions, saying: "Come, O Holy Spirit, and comfort us in our miseries, for while we gladly welcome all who comfort us in Thy name, their efforts are as nothing compared with the *all-satisfying* comfort given by Thee, O God, of all comforters the best."

VI.—DULCIS HOSPES ANIMÆ

(O Thou, the soul's delightful Guest.)

1. SOME of our earliest and most interesting memories are bound up with the visits of friends to the old home. What hopes were excited in our young breasts! How clearly laid down and how sternly exacted were the rules of good conduct suited to the occasion! They may have been honoured, perhaps, more in the breach than the observance (for in those days we were but wayward children), but the impression made has been lasting. Through those very rules we, in maturer years, have gathered the important fact that an invited guest is a person to be honoured, and that we, in honouring him, are doing honour to ourselves. His presence under the roof-tree is testimony to his worth, and his willingness to associate himself with our household is a proof of his confidence in us. While enjoying our hospitality, a guest is regarded as one of ourselves. Our trust is mutual. We throw ourselves on each other's mercy. Our feelings are, for the time being, largely identical. A sound sentiment of goodwill and self-respect exists all round, and if our home be to us our castle, it is, or ought to be, to our guest a paradise of delight. Even at great personal inconvenience everything is done to secure that the guest may feel quite at home, and so steps are taken, sometimes long beforehand, to ascertain his tastes. The household regards it as a duty to see that those tastes are as far as is possible gratified. The result looked for is that the guest may feel he has had the happiest time of his life, and that he will long to renew his visit.

No wonder, then, that the proper choice of guests is, in a well-ordered home, a matter of great moment; for it may ultimately mean honour or dishonour, peace or strife, and, to all concerned, weal or woe. Hence a wise saying has come down to us, to the effect that a man is known by the company he keeps. Nor is Holy Scripture silent with regard to this important matter: "And if thou see a man of understanding, go to him early in the morning, and let thy foot wear the steps of his door" (*Ecclus.* vi. 35, 36). "Let just men be thy guests" (*Ecclus.* ix. 21). "He that feareth God, shall likewise have good friendship: because according to him shall his friend be" (*Ecclus.* vi. 17). Whilst these texts bear on the advantages when hosts and guests are virtuously inclined, there are

many others suggestive of evil results, if a proper choice be not made. "Thou helpest the ungodly, and thou art joined in friendship with them that hate the Lord, and therefore thou didst deserve indeed the wrath of the Lord" (2 *Paral.* xix. 2). "Be not seduced: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 *Cor.* xv. 33). "But if you will embrace the errors of these nations that dwell among you, . . . and join friendships: know for a certainty that . . . they shall be a pit and a snare in your way, and a stumbling-block at your side, and stakes in your eyes, till he [the Lord your God] take you away, and destroy you from off this excellent land, which he hath given you" (*Jos.* xxiii. 12, 13).

Until the end of time man, social being as he is, will delight in throwing open his doors to his fellows; but, if he be prudent, he will take counsel with his inner self on the reputation of those who come up before his mind as candidates for admission to his household.

The exercise or our ordinary powers of observation has, in the course of life, borne witness to the wisdom of the maxim above mentioned—viz., that a man is known by his company. A passing glance, without any wish at all to pry into secrets, has often revealed to us many of the conditions of a neighbour's life. At some particular door stood a hearse, and we knew that Death was, on the other side of the threshold, a guest. By another door stood a medical man, or a nurse, and we compassionated those within; for we knew that a melancholy guest was with them, in the guise of sickness. Here stood a bailiff, and we pitied the home that was evidently visited by misfortune. There was drawn up a courtly equipage, which told us that the guest was an honourable one, and that the home, from social points of view, was enviable. Truly, the nature of one's guests gives considerable insight into the life of the host. But, that our insight may fit in with all the facts, we must first ascertain whether the guests are there by invitation or by evasion of social laws, for not all guests are welcome to their host. Some are self-invited and only there on sufferance; others may be there in direct opposition to the wish of the householder; while not a few may present themselves under false pretences. Short of the doors of a home being firmly closed, such things are possible; and as rational beings do not fasten their doors, but delight rather in throwing them open for the exercise of hospitality, it follows that, in our application of the old saying, we must guard against rash judgment, not only in social but also in moral matters.

2. If we content ourselves with a study of the blessings arising from social intercourse, we shall have only a one-sided view of human life. To have a true view we must reflect on the desolation caused by loneliness. Not to speak of self-imposed isolation from one's fellows in the interest of some high purpose, the victim to social aloofness is indeed to be pitied. In view of the innate longing for companionship, which is the prerogative of every social being, isolation from one's fellow men is worse than death.

Think of it! no friendly knock at one's own door, and no hospitable door thrown open for the lonely being: the social world rushing past, and none of its votaries stopping to give even a nod: the postman on his rounds bringing greetings to others from far and wide, but to the lonely one not even a business prospectus. Who could long endure this social boycott without being driven to desperation? Death would seem, and would really be, much sweeter; for it would mean a visit to that forlorn home, and for a visit of any sort at all the desolate soul longs with all its might.

Do we not find here the secret of many a spiritual disaster? Oh, the harm that is done by shutting others out from our hearts, misguided by specious pretexts of "principle," "justice," and kindred excuses! In the exercise of so-called justice we ignore the injunction of Holy Scripture: "Be not over-just: and be not more wise than is necessary, lest thou become stupid" (*Eccles.* vii. 17). When the Books are opened, we may find innumerable souls damned because of their neighbours having been over-just. Forgetful of the tempered justice of God in their own regard by the pardon of their sins, they thrust out of their hearts poor benighted creatures, and, perhaps, infected neighbours with their relentless spirit. They drove to despair poor outcast souls that had clung to unworthy people who came their way, not because they loved their evil deeds, but through sheer need of sympathy and companionship. They had sought these comforts in what they deemed Christ-like quarters, and had been denied; who then, now that they have succumbed, will dare cast the first stone?

These considerations will surely lead us to beware of coldness, harshness, and studied antipathies; offences to which the cloister is by no means a stranger; for not only are these lines of conduct occasionally followed in dealing with those whose failings inspire dislike, but also in dealing with new clients sent by God to the Congregation. Cases are on record in which generous young

hearts have been chilled to their very depths by lack of sympathy; by lack of effort to reconcile them gradually to their new form of life; and by making them fear that they were unwelcome. Let us beware of committing in this sacred enclosure any fault that might make us responsible for the loss of vocation, through driving our neighbour into the dreary wastes of isolation. Let us frequently ponder over the words: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (*Ps.* cxxxii. 1). "In fine, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, being lovers of the brotherhood, merciful, modest, humble" (1 *St. Pet.* iii. 8).

A true Religious delights in being accessible to all his neighbours, for in each he recognizes the creative hand of God, and, in most of them, the sign of God's adoption through Holy Baptism. When they are his brethren in the cloister, he moreover sees and admires a Divine call from the wicked world. They become the guests of his soul. Though all of them may not be from all points of view recommendable, yet, remembering his own imperfections, he puts them not to the door. In this he betrays no principle, for Jesus, his Master and Model, was the "Friend of Sinners": "Behold a man that is a friend of publicans and sinners" (*St. Matt.* xi. 19). The friendships of Christ did not mean the omission of an iota of the Law with a view to secure them; neither will the Religious omit a single duty in his search of, or labours for, his guests; for he knows that God will bless his endeavours in proportion to his exact observance. He becomes, nevertheless, like St. Paul, "all things to all men in order to save all." "To the weak I became weak, that I might gain the weak. I became all things to all men that I might save all" (1 *Cor.* ix. 22). One thing he does *not* admit as a guest—viz., *sin;* and if there is any human being to whom he is not at home, it is to him only who is obstinate in sin and who glories in it. In such a case, he rightly feels that his endeavours may not safely go beyond prayers and tears for the melting of that ice-bound heart, through some special grace of God. With these exceptions he opens his heart to all, for he looks on all others as the children of the Heavenly Father.

Such a man is never lonely. He himself, by some inscrutable permission or dispensation of God, may find himself excluded from the hearts of others; but as he within his soul is ever entertaining visitors sent by God, he is far from being lonely. All God's creatures knock at the door of his soul for admission, in order that

sweet converse may be held regarding the Divine goodness and power, beauty and love. As animate creatures went to Adam to be named by him, so they come to this man to serve as aids on his upward way to God; for, like St. Francis and St. Antony, he speaks to them and asks them to join with him in praising and blessing the Creator. If we followed him as he treads his way through forests, or climbs mountains, or silently plods along country roads, or looks dreamily overseas; and if we could at the same time see into his soul, we should find him to be the least lonely man in the world. Far from being lonely, he is in constant touch with all the universe. He is, through prayer, in direct though unseen communication with the pagan, heretical, and schismatical world, and all its dense population are his guests. No one grasps better than he the inner meaning of the Communion of Saints, for he holds daily converse with the Saints and Blessed, weeps in spirit with the souls in Purgatory, and keeps in touch with all the armies of the Church Militant. All this, however, does not satisfy his soul. Knowing that the heavens and the earth and all that they contain are infinitely less than the Mighty Being who drew them out of original nothingness, the beauty and the worth of the guests he entertains but increase his longing for the coming of the Holy Spirit, who sent them.

3. The foregoing considerations should help us to discover our attitude towards persons and things that, from childhood, have been knocking at the door of our souls for admission. During all those years there has been an uninterrupted procession. No biograph can ever be half as interesting, pathetic, or tragic as the procession of guests to the door of a human soul. They arrive by the avenues of the senses and by the three corridors of the soul: the memory, understanding, and will. They are dropped on us by the imagination, sometimes in a fashion quite as startling as when missiles are dropped by an aeroplane. Not a face has ever been seen, nor page read, nor subject studied, without the result having been the arrival of a new batch of welcome or unwelcome guests. Our attitude towards them has largely influenced us, either for better or for worse; and this being so, we should not dream of leaving our Retreat without deciding how we mean, in the future, to deal with all that seek formal admission to our souls on the one hand, and, on the other, with all that may surreptitiously enter. It behoves us, as good Religious and faithful custodians of the soul, to

be far more solicitous about the nature of would-be guests than prudent householders are about the reputation of those who sit down at their table and share their confidence. In the first point of our meditation we dwelt on the anxiety of the average host lest any but the worthy should be knowingly admitted to his home. And when we consider that the soul, the inner sanctuary of *our* home, has been washed clean in the Blood of the Lamb, and furnished and beautified with graces which are the choice fruits of that Precious Blood, it would be little short of sacrilege to admit anything that could defile its sanctity.

If we but reflect, we shall find that most of the mistakes of the past have been due to the voluntary reception of unworthy or doubtful guests: improper thoughts, wrong desires, wicked imaginations, unholy suggestions, all of which should have been sternly refused admission. If it be pleaded that they stealthily introduced themselves into the sanctuary of the soul, under cover of our ordinary duties, it behoved us to repudiate them when their true character was disclosed. If, on the contrary, their stay was encouraged, we were, in greater or in lesser degree, faithless to the trust reposed in us.

Who can say that he is guiltless of having received and entertained guests that did not come with an introduction from the Holy Spirit, but were rather wolves in sheep's clothing, fraudulently introduced by our own lower nature? Nay, have we not sometimes acted the part of cowards, by timidly opening the doors of our soul to unrighteous guests, simply because they knocked with bold insistence, and were more persevering in their effrontery than we in our loyalty? This is especially the case when, through human respect, we yield to the importunities of the detractor, the calumniator, the murmurer, or the scoffer, and make common cause with one or the other. Oh, how we should bewail the cowardice and infidelity of the past, and resolve to be better spiritual householders for the future.

We must never forget that no unworthy guest can possibly do us harm unless we voluntarily open the door. Suggestions and imaginations that stealthily enter the soul through one or other of its many avenues, and even make their presence felt by sensible impressions on our bodily frame, cannot hurt us unless we make them welcome. They are the *motus primo primi*, of which theologians speak—*i.e.*, the very first possible movements; and

so long as they remain in that category we are not responsible. They are *in* us but need not be *of* us, unless by a perversion of the will we make them our own and connive at their presence. If, with all sincerity, we but say: "O my God, these unpleasant visitors are most unwelcome: they are in me but not of me," our heavenly Father will admit our goodwill, and no matter how long the unbidden visitors may linger and harass us by their importunities, their efforts will be vain, if we only persevere in our high spiritual disdain.

This will console those who may be a prey to such unholy invasions. It will give new courage to those who, in their timidity, imagine that the citadel of the soul has surrendered, because of the presence of unholy guests. God forbid! A surrender is made only when the soul, knowingly and willingly, gives itself up into their hands and makes common cause with them. The breathing of our aspiration, the offering of our ejaculation, the mute elevation of the soul to God, the signing of oneself with the cross: all or any of these practices is quite sufficient proof to God, and to one's own conscience, that there has been neither truce nor friendship with the unwelcome intruders.

But the safest rule by far is so to fill our soul with righteous guests as to make the entrance of unworthy ones a practical impossibility. If we love to dwell on high and holy things, on God's attributes, the words of our beloved Lord, the virtues and the privileges of our sweet mother Mary, the sayings and doings of the saints, the duties of our state, the delights of virtue, the glories of Heaven, there will be no room left for the depraved intruders above spoken of. Nay, their very appearance at the door of the soul will in itself be sufficient to put us on our guard and to inflame us with just anger; for their sordidness will be discovered because of the refined and elevated thoughts to which we have, by God's help, trained ourselves. *These* are guests wearing the wedding garments of the King of kings; the others, clothed in the sombre robes of Satan, will be thrust from our souls into the exterior darkness.

4. The sweetness found in entertaining the guests just spoken of, far from satiating the soul, stimulates its desire to be filled with the Spirit of God, for whom it was created. With St. Augustine

it cries out: "I have been created for Thee, O my God, and never can I rest until I find my repose in Thee"; for it realizes that nothing finite can ever satisfy it, created as it has been for the infinite. Nor does it think itself overbold in longing to be filled with God Himself, for it knows that such is God's eternal wish: "Know you not that you are the temples of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 *Cor.* iii. 16). "But you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his" (*Rom.* viii. 9). "If any one love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him" (*St. John* xiv. 23).

From these texts we gather that, so long as there is in our soul an atmosphere befitting Him, the Holy Spirit of God will take up His abode within us and become our "delightful Guest." What an honour! What a privilege! How mean and despicable all worldly guests now appear! And although the unworldly guests already spoken of may be attired in spiritual splendour, we cannot but remember that it is a splendour borrowed from the light of the Holy Ghost; and so we make not even them the goal of our desires. As the only adornment befitting the indwelling of the Holy Ghost is that of sanctifying grace, the faithful Religious spares no pains to keep his soul spotless. He is untiring in his efforts to deepen and intensify it, so as to induce the Divine Guest to prolong His stay and to find increasing pleasure in being with him, until the time comes for the consummation of that wonderful union in the Eternal Home.

In this world, where vision is so limited and where speech is so fettered, no man can pretend to describe in adequate terms the blissful union between the immortal soul and the Infinite and Eternal Guest. We know that it is not of the same nature as the Hypostatic Union, neither is it of the same nature as the union of soul and body; but that it is real, and means more than the actual possession of sanctifying grace, is the teaching of the Church, and is abundantly clear from the texts quoted. How we should rejoice in the knowledge! How it should suggest to us deep self-reverence, modesty, meekness, peaceableness, and the spirit of prayer and recollection! How it should suggest reverence for others! And we must always suppose that our neigh-

bours, as well as we, are taking pains to fit their souls for the visits of the Divine Guest and for a similar union. How eagerly we should listen to His whisperings, how anxiously we should seek His counsel in doubts and difficulties, and, in fine, how earnestly and continuously we should cry: "Oh, come! Oh, stay with us, our soul's delightful Guest!"

VII.—DULCE REFRIGERIUM.

(The pilgrim's sweet relief.)

1. THE day that witnessed our birth saw us setting out on pilgrimage. We were created to do the will of God, and set on the road of life to work out our destiny. God wills us to be sanctified: "This is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 *Thess.* iv. 3). Our destiny is Heaven: "I am thy reward, exceeding great" (*Gen.* xv. 1). So, from the cradle to the grave, life means a struggle for sanctity, and a pilgrimage towards the everlasting goal where sanctity is to be rewarded.

In these respects all human beings, different as may be the conditions of their life, are exactly alike. The distance is far from a beggar's hut to the palace of a king; still farther from the heart of a child, born in original sin, to the heart of Mary, conceived and born immaculate. Many are the grades in social life between the hut and the palace; almost innumerable are the degrees of goodness between the ordinary child and Mary; but the business and end of life are essentially the same for all: to know, to love, and to serve God during the pilgrimage, and to reach His own Divine Self at the end. Beggar and king, sinner and saint, are mixed with one another on this great highway of life.

During the first few years of our existence our pilgrimage was made along the beaten track of ordinary Christian duty towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves; but a time came when it took a new direction. It was not new in the sense of our discovering a different line of duty; nor was it new through the presentment of a different goal; but it was distinctly new in this, that, in taking it, we swerved off from the beaten track and resolved to follow in the footsteps of the few. In one word, we were assured that we had a vocation to the Religious Life. The assurance did not convey the idea that our pilgrimage, so far, had been a failure; nor did it suggest to us that those left behind were on a wrong or dangerous road. It did, however, suggest that, called as we were to a pathway trodden by those invited to higher spiritual perfection, our gratitude to God should be deep, and our efforts to reach perfection in our new state should be lasting.

Thus it is that, when one is not a mere thoughtless youth, the dawn of a religious vocation is for ever memorable. It may have taken years to reach our horizon, but once it loomed up even

dimly before the mind it occasioned untold joy. On some souls it makes such an impression as to lead them to exclaim: "Whence is this to me that I should be so favoured, while others, much more worthy, are led to tread the ordinary Christian pathway?" Would that someone, gifted with true insight, compiled the history of religious vocations. How its pages would reveal the secrets of God's most intimate dealings with the human soul: for the experience of many Religious is that never was God's providential care more manifest than then. Not until we were called by Him did we realize that He was really interested in *us*. We dimly knew that, as units in the vast scheme of creation, we were known by Him and loved; redeemed by Him, sanctified, and destined for Himself; but vocation lifted up the veil, and we beheld how personal, deep, and tender was His predilection.

Oh, how admirable are God's wisdom, love, and mercy in this unique sphere of His providence; for, in some cases, the means by which the pathway is reached seem almost miraculous. Vocations are granted not only to the innocent but to the penitent; not only to those who lived simple, docile, humble lives, but to those who had been worldly minded, or wayward, or proud. We have only to think of St. Benedict, St. Bernard, St. Clare, St. Dominic, and St. Aloysius, to be reminded of the one class; and of St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius, and St. Teresa, as examples of the other. Not less strange, and therefore not less worthy of notice, is the manner in which the Divine message is conveyed. Sometimes from childhood an inner voice calls one to this way of perfection—a voice which, though often drowned in the clamorous noises of the world, yet makes itself heard eventually, and becomes imperative. The soul is led to listen, and ends by being convinced. The final call may summon one when buried in the shadows of a church bewailing his sins, or come almost as a voice from the Tabernacle, or from Mary's shrine. In the stillness of a Retreat, God may whisper in the heart, or He may knock loudly at its door in the excitement of a parochial mission. Not unfrequently, the Holy Spirit may speak when one is watching by a sick-bed, or when he stands pensively by an open grave. But, strangest thing of all! the very contemplation of some grave sin has, as history tells, caused such revulsion of feeling as to throw the would-be guilty soul right into the outstretched arms of God. As Saul, contemplating evil deeds, was struck down on the way to Damascus, and shown how he should walk, in response to his cry: "Lord, what

wilt thou have me to do?" (*Acts* ix. 6), so this soul cries out: "O God! Where and how shall I go, that I may save my soul from danger?" And God, in reply, points out to him the steep, thorny pathway of the cloister.

Should not our hearts rekindle with loving fire in pondering over the history of our own vocation to be followers of the Lamb, whithersoever He goeth? Humanly speaking, we alone know all its secrets. It may be that the stages on the way are not remembered, but never can we forget that, even as the hearts of the Apostles burned within them on the way to Emmaus because of the Lord's drawing nigh, so our hearts beat faster as the Holy Spirit drew nigh and spoke to us on our pilgrimage to the cloister.

In ages of faith pilgrimages beset with difficulties and dangers were undertaken to show gratitude for favours received; to obtain some new favour; to do penance for past sins; or through a desire to press the pathway trodden by our Blessed Lord. Some such motive doubtless animated us when we turned into the narrow path of religious perfection. Whatever it was, it should guide us in our inquiries during Retreat. If we meant to prove our gratitude for past favours, we should ask ourselves whether our progress in virtue is equal to our original good intentions. If our motive was to expiate our past sins by humbly and patiently bearing all the trials of our state, we should inquire whether we have fallen from it by our cowardice in shunning difficulties or by our weakness in seeking comforts. Consciousness of even a slight departure from the pathway marked out for us by our Divine Guide should fill us with anxiety to regain lost ground, remembering that: "No man putting his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of heaven" (*St. Luke* ix. 62).

This serious outlook will free the glance into the past from all danger of sentimentality. While some vocations have in them elements of the truest poetry, all of them bear the mark of God's special providence. A view of the past is, therefore, of great value in refreshing our memories with regard to the fervent wishes entertained in bygone days, when God called us from the world to turn our way, as religious pilgrims, towards the shrine of Eternal Bliss. Then we weighed the issues, chose our Institute, and regarded that Institute as the highway along which we should be safely led to the goal of our hopes. That Goal was no other than God Himself, imaged as the King of the Great Country towards which we were setting out.

2. When a pilgrimage is a matter of choice and not heedlessly undertaken, the choice has been the result of an appeal made to the mind by the distant land or by the venerated shrine. The remote object attracts with magnetic force; this attraction in the end proves irresistible. This is verified in vocations to the religious life, especially in those which come when the days of youth are practically over, and the power of other attractions has been fully felt and overcome. The next thing that happens—and it is very remarkable—is the excitement of curiosity with regard to our companions on the way. We may have known them all our lives, and yet failed to see the depths of their hearts. The knowledge, however, that they also yearn for the goal on which our souls are bent furnishes us with a plummet that enables us to fathom hitherto unknown depths. Knowing the feelings by which we ourselves are moved, we deem that we are safe in gauging theirs. Thus it is that our hearts in bygone days went out to our associates in the religious pilgrimage, in new-found generous sympathy.

We instinctively felt that our views in general were shared by our associates, and as the success of a pilgrimage depends largely on mutual sympathy it was a discovery of very great importance. Many a pilgrimage has proved useless, because of the difference of temperament of those who undertook it. At times the courage of a would-be pilgrim has failed him on the way, because of real or imaginary disillusionment regarding his fellow-travellers. We are far from pleading for uniformity of disposition in those who seek the same goal—that would be pleading for the impossible—but there are some essentials in which all true pilgrims should agree—*i.e.*, in enthusiasm for the goal to be reached, interest in all that helps towards the goal, and good-fellowship with those who are sharers of our joys and sorrows on the way.

Looking back on the enthusiasm of our novitiate and the earlier years of our professed life, can we now truthfully say that it is still unflagging? Do we keep our eyes as intently fixed on the goal as we did in past days when we understood so clearly that the goal in this life was religious perfection, and, in the other, God Himself? With regard to the use of means, some of them essential and others more or less helpful for the success of the pilgrimage, have we neglected the study of our rule and constitutions, in which those means are insisted on? If so, have we not reason to fear that we shall either lose our way, or reach the end

of our journey only to find that our holy Founder knows us not? For what does it avail to wear a holy habit if internally we are ignorant of the Founder's spirit? Surely we need not be reminded that, after God's Holy Law and the Commandments of the Church, our rule of the road is the one put into our hands on the day of our clothing. Have we adhered to our itinerary, disposing the hours of the day as recommended?

In setting out on our pilgrimage, our belongings were reduced to the narrowest limits. Holy poverty relieved us of worldly burdens, and we were well content with the barely necessary. We gloried in our freedom; our steps were light, and our shoulders easy, as we set out on the road. Are we as free to-day, or does not our affection towards the comforts of life weigh us down? Has not the spirit of proprietorship so increased as to embarrass our onward march? Are we forgetting that the pilgrim-way is not a way of ease, but a way of penance and self-renunciation? Is not that way made clear to the pilgrim's eye by the streaks of Blood left by the Master's feet as He led the van?

Where is now the implicit trust in our religious guides that once was our delight? They have not ceased to guide, nor has God failed to endow them with authority; but we, alas! have lost our simplicity, humility, docility, and reverence. And, with regard to our companions on the way, do we still cherish towards them kindly feelings; or has not familiarity with them, or perhaps their very condescension, tended to breed contempt? Are we helpful to the weak, reverential towards the aged, tender towards the sick, respectful to those whose experience and perseverance invest them with a certain dignity, even though they move in the humblest ranks of the community?

If our conscience reproach us on these latter points, we should ask ourselves how such conduct compares with the spirit of good-fellowship—necessary even for the success of an ordinary pilgrimage. Surely the pilgrimage to the Better Land is also worthy of self-sacrifice, patience, charity, and goodwill! Let us, then, renew the good intentions fostered by us when God, in His goodness and mercy, blessed us with our holy vocation. In former days we resolved to be true pilgrims to the end. Then our eyes were intently fixed on the goal, and we took to our hearts the welfare of our fellow-pilgrims. Having persevered so long, it would be craven to think of throwing aside the pilgrim's staff and of halting on the way. And it would be no less cowardly to

lower our hopes of religious perfection. God knows! we may have strayed somewhat from the path, or, while still on the way, have lost the pilgrim-spirit. But His grace will enable us to retrace our steps, and the Holy Ghost will fill us with a new spirit, like that which made our youthful steps so light and our youthful hearts so joyous.

3. In the seventh chapter of the Book of Job we are reminded that man's life is a warfare. "The life of man upon earth is a warfare, and his days are like the days of a hireling. As a servant longeth for the shade, as the hireling looketh for the end of his work; so I also have had empty months, and I have numbered to myself wearisome nights" (*Job* vii. 1, 2). Whether the pilgrimage be made along the track trodden by many feet in the world, or on the narrower one pressed by the feet of Religious, it is all the same.

The very idea of a pilgrimage has, in all ages, suggested hardship and difficulty. Some of the noblest deeds in history have been achieved by the patient endurance of difficulties that beset pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land. Indeed, they welcomed those hardships, and offered them up in proof of the sincerity of their desire to do penance for their sins, or to show gratitude for favours received. Moreover, the very sublimity of the goal warranted, to their minds, more than ordinary trials. Every true pilgrim takes it as an axiom that the grander the goal the more difficult must be the quest. Hence, it follows that as the Religious seeks more than ordinary perfection, his search for it will be attended with more than ordinary difficulties; for: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him much shall be required" (*St. Luke* xii. 48). If the average Christian has to wage war with his triple foe—the devil, the world, and the flesh—promotion to the ranks of those who travel under the banner of the cloister will not save him from the conflict; on the contrary, it is likely to prove more trying and incessant. Closer proximity to Jesus Christ, the cross-laden Leader of the pilgrimage, while it means a joy more intense, means also sufferings more severe.

This may help to explain some of the difficulties that embarrass beginners in the religious life—viz., how is it that, in a state of perfection, there can be found so many jarring elements; or how does it come to pass that, even in saintly souls, there are so many blemishes; or how, again, account for the fact that, in a home of

peace, the soul can be so restless? The full answer is given in the call to the special service of God: "Son, when thou comest to the service of God, stand in justice and in fear, and prepare thy soul for temptation" (*Ecclus.* ii. 1).

The pilgrim's path will sometimes be obscured by mists that blot out his vision of God and Heaven, all the while that they exaggerate the peculiarities of his brethren. We may have noticed how huge a human figure seems when it looms up unexpectedly in a dense fog. So also, when the soul is befogged, the smallest failings of its neighbours appear much greater than they are in reality.

Not only may distress be caused by the human frailties of his fellow-pilgrims, but it may be the natural consequence of the journey, for "narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life" (*St. Matt.* vii. 14). Hard work, penance, mortification, and the monotony of routine, may prove real afflictions, no matter how willing the spirit. The author of the *Imitation*, who had such deep insight into the religious life, shows us a list of the trials that await us: "Labours and sorrows, temptations and vexations, anxieties, necessities, sickness, injuries, detractions, reprehensions, humiliations, confusions, corrections, and contempt" (bk. iii., c. 35). But he assures us that "these things help to obtain virtue; these try a novice of Christ; these procure a heavenly crown." The more determined the pilgrim's resolution to persevere to the end, the more sluggish and weary will the flesh seem to be; the more resolute his hatred of the world, the more incessantly will the world appear to affect his peace; the more strenuously he wrestles with Satan, that robber who lurks in the defiles, the more cunningly will the enemy try to ensure his downfall. "And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee" (*Tobias* xii. 13). In some exceptional cases we find examples of such fierce conflicts as, if related, would seem to the average Religious simply incredible: conflicts, alas! which did not always result in the victory of the poor pilgrim.

In travelling abroad our attention is, from time to time, directed by our guide not only to spots of encouraging interest, but also to scenes of disaster. We may pass close to scenes of victory, well calculated to inflame our Christian pride, where, for example, champions of the Cross withstood the onset of the Turks; or to spots whereon rested the sacred feet of Christ, or where Mary passed by; where Anthony the Hermit struggled valiantly with

hellish foes ; where St. Francis, through love of the Crucified, was stigmatized ; or where St. Ignatius hung up his sword, and trusted henceforth to the sword of the Spirit. Such scenes, more or less remotely, conjure up pictures of the conquest over spiritual foes, and strengthen our personal courage. But there are others that fill us with dismay, and that, seriously considered, should act as lifelong warnings. Here did Judas perpetrate his awful crime, and there did he despair of God's mercy; here did Luther abandon the religious life ; and yonder did calamity overtake the ambitious youth who, eager to climb too high, left his bones bleaching in the deep crevasse. Here came down a hurricane so fierce that it swept into the abyss the pilgrims who were not roped to their guides ; and, elsewhere, smiling waters now concealed the dangers once caused by the lashing of angry waves.

In the religious pilgrimage analogous events have happened. Thousands have passed along the highway of the Cross. On the way to the bourne of their hopes they have scaled the heights and walked along the edge of precipitous cliffs undeterred. But some few in every epoch have been waylaid by spiritual robbers, or, by the special permission of the Divine Guide, exposed to hurricanes of temptation. Never once did God permit more than could be borne, had they in the hour of trial turned to Him, the Pilgrim's Sweet Relief. We find proofs of this in the lives of the saints who, far more than ordinary souls, were tempted and persecuted. In their sore straits they sought relief and conquered, no matter how strong the opposing force. When, then, we hear or read tales of spiritual disaster we know that, blinded, soured, and despairing, the hapless victims did not seek relief where, in those dismal hours, it could alone be found—in God. The story has its moral, for we sometimes are prone to think that never did pilgrims suffer as we. In such a crisis we might be tempted to despair, if we did not recall to mind that the Holy Spirit, who called us, is ever near to afford relief, if we but humbly implore Him to come to our aid.

He knows that ir succour were not forthcoming in seasonable time our courage might fail. He knows, too, that we made ourselves poor for His Name's sake, and left old friends behind in favour of the new, and chose whatever resting-places obedience might provide on the way. He hastens, therefore, Heavenly Samaritan that He is, to pour oil into our wounds, to shade us from scorching heat, and save us from lurking foes. The timely

aid brings courage to our hearts, light to our minds, and words of gratitude to our lips. Our early views of the worth of our fellow-pilgrims remain unshaken—nay, we now discern more clearly their sterling worth; for those who have left all behind for Christ's dear sake have in them qualities that more than redeem their merely human failings. And when poverty stings (and St. Teresa assures us there can be no true poverty without its sting), the Holy Spirit reminds us through St. Paul that, although we have nothing, we yet possess all things. Anxiety will occasionally annoy us regarding our broken family ties, but relief is quickly given by God, who reminds us that we belong to a world-wide family, whose every member is allied to us by the holy bond of vocation. He reminds us, too, that whereas we left one revered home in the world, we have now as many as there are convents in the Institute, and that the Host in each and all is our beloved Saviour in the Blessed Sacrament. Nor are human comforts wanting, for the spirit prevalent in every cloistered home is that of the seraphic St. Francis who, in the sixth chapter of his rule, writes as follows: "For if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently should one love and care for his brother according to the spirit." The heart of a Religious goes out to his brethren in corporal as well as in spiritual needs, and brings home to us the truth of the words of the royal Psalmist: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (*Ps.* cxxxii. 1).

On this really favoured highway, many are the spots where one may rest, when, tired and almost worn out, forlorn and tempted, he is almost fain to abandon his task. Led by the Holy Spirit, he finds himself at Mary's feet, or before a shrine wherein lie martyrs' relics, or, it may be, beside the tomb of a sainted fellow-Religious who loyally made his pilgrimage. His jaded spirits revive, his courage is renewed; he feels emboldened for even fiercer struggles, and strong enough to bear even heavier burdens.

4. We have seen how the Spirit of God on the pilgrim's way, though permitting suffering in mind and body, has always hastened to give relief. Even when that relief has been offered by human hands, or has flowed through natural channels, He, the Heavenly Guide, has been the source of all. Only a few out of many modes of relief have been considered, but as each retreatant is, doubtless, "considering in the heart," comforting experiences will be

remembered and fervent acts of thanksgiving will be made. But, after all, it is as our Emmanuel—God with us—that our Divine Guide shows the infinite and unspeakable reality of His wish to help us. Knowing how the weary traveller longs for the roof of some kindly host, under which to rest and fit himself for the next day's journey; knowing, too, how the pilgrim, groaning under the attacks of some insidious disease, eagerly seeks the physician's aid; knowing, moreover, how a benighted pilgrim turns right and left for guidance and for the allaying of his fears, He, the great God, makes himself at once Host and Friend, Physician and Guide. He offers the hospitality of His roof, invites the pilgrim to His table, binds up his wounds, cures his diseases, and condescends to clear up his doubts, smooth away difficulties, and set him once more on the way, refreshed and filled with courage.

Oh, what heavenly relief to find oneself day and night under the same roof with our Divine Guide in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar! What a relief to have daily access to His Holy Table, and to be privileged to visit Him at will for consolation, guidance, and strength! What a relief, in stress and strain, to rest at His feet and to hear Him speak!—for no one visits Jesus without hearing His sweet voice in the heart, if that heart, in childlike spirit, disposes itself to listen.

It would be an endless task to attempt the enumeration of the many ways in which relief comes to the religious pilgrim. He sometimes enjoys, as it were in advance, a glimpse of the promised land; at one time God dries his tears, and, at another, allows them to flow; in one hour the unbridled zeal of the pilgrim is restrained, and in another he is chidden for his sloth. Whatever be the remedy for the passing trial, or the gift for the temporary need, we know it comes from the hand of the tenderest of physicians, and the most generous of benefactors. Well may God exclaim: "All you that thirst, come to the waters" (*Isa.* lv. 1). "Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (*St. Matt.* xi. 28). And what pilgrim will refuse to join in the refrain: "We have passed through fire and water and thou hast brought us out into a refreshment" (*Ps.* lxv. 18)? "As the hart panteth after the fountain of waters, so my soul panteth after thee, O Lord" (*Ps.* xli. 2). "My soul hath panted after the living God" (*Ps.* v. 3).

Thus the years glide on with their sorrows and joys, trials and consolations, and year by year the pilgrim nears the goal. With

emotion he recalls to mind the early stages of the journey. He loves to think of old companions, now gone to their reward, and feels that they, in spirit, help him still. His heart becomes more tender, his sympathies wider, his compassion more and more deep, the nearer he draws to the Eternal Home. Full of gratitude for past favours, he awaits the last relief—Jesus Christ in the Holy Viaticum. The eyes that strained for a vision of the goal are anointed—and the hands that laboured for bread on the way, the nostrils that seemed to scent from afar the perfumes of the celestial garden, the lips that praised the God of Sion, and the feet that sought the Better Land. And now he enters in. His pilgrimage is over, and he has reached the goal.

VIII.—IN LABORE REQUIES

(Thou art true rest in toil and sweat.)

1. A STRANGER visiting a monastery is struck with the air of repose that pervades the entire place. That he has not reached a Sleepy Hollow is abundantly clear, for on all sides he finds wonderful activity. In lecture-room, library, workshops, laundry, kitchen, and garden, the Religious are busy with their allotted tasks; but their work is done in such a calm, self-possessed, and measured manner, that it intensifies the air of repose, which seemed at first sight to be due only to the quaint gables and the spacious cloisters. He realizes, perhaps for the first time in his life, that true rest may be enjoyed during the hardest toil. So should it ever be in the cloister. While the secular toiler seeks rest after his day's work is done, the Religious should so labour as to find it always. It is to be found through labouring in the presence of God, by the help of God, and for the glory of God. He who labours thus makes light of the usual forms of rest. It is the interior spirit, just adverted to, which distinguishes the Religious from the toilers outside, who, like himself, earn their bread by the sweat of their brow.

Many years ago the writer, when yet a youth in the world, witnessed a striking example of this. A squad of stonemasons were working around the recently laid foundations of a Franciscan church. All were clever workmen, and all were equally busy. But one of the number could be singled out as differing from the others, for his bearing suggested that he was resting *in* his work. All the while that he toiled and sweated his soul was in God's presence, and aspiration for God's help accompanied every stroke of the mallet, and the glory of God and the good of his Order were his sole ambitions. He was a Franciscan lay brother. Working in the open, in a Protestant city, his garb was that of the ordinary toiler, but his features reflected the restful spirit of a true Religious. He had found out the secret, that if the toiler's mind and heart be with God, God will be with him.

In the cloister there is no respite from labour. Indeed, it may be frankly said that the Religious who is true to his vocation works harder than he ever did in the world. But the greater expenditure of energy is more than compensated for by restfulness in the Holy Spirit: *in labore requies*. Then, how different the methods of

labour and the results! The worldly method is hustling and restless—the cloister method measured and calm. Work in the world is so often scamped—in the cloister it is conscientiously done.

The existing pre-Reformation abbeys and cathedrals and the relics of monastic handiwork which are stored in our museums testify to the truth of our statement. Those who laid those solid foundations and who were responsible for the raising up of those sublime edifices; those who laboriously yet patiently transcribed and illuminated priceless manuscripts, worked in the spirit of the text. They found rest in spending themselves for the love of their Lord and Master. He was their reward exceeding great. Hence the solidity and the charm of their work. Whereas the work of the mercenary is sprinkled only with his sweat, the work of the true monk may be said to be bedewed with the Precious Blood.

Consider the long rows of folios in the great ecclesiastical libraries, the copies of Biblical texts and classic works that have been bequeathed to the world from those beehives of industry, the monasteries of old. How they reveal to us the spirit in which our predecessors in the cloister laboured! Whether their work was intellectual or manual; national, provincial, or domestic; utilitarian or artistic, we find it stamped with the hall-mark of the Spirit of God. Preparatory to the work, the Divine blessing was invoked; during the work, the minds of the toilers were recollected in God; when completed, it was dedicated to His glory; and sweet was the repose following in the consciousness of duty loyally fulfilled. They laboured for an eternity of rest, but before they reached the bourne God in His generosity gave them a refreshing foretaste of its sweets.

Reflections on those magnificent achievements and on the restful spirit which accompanied them have been the source of many religious vocations even to the present day. It may be that there are in this community souls whose passage from the world to the cloister was helped by the thought that work in the world was far too aimless and restless to satisfy their hunger for peace and rest in God. Meditating on the lives of the Religious of past ages, studying their works and the reposeful manner in which those works were done, the suggestion came that, even in the present century, the spirit of the cloister is identical with that of old. Mindful of the Divine decree by which all of us are doomed

to labour for our daily bread, those who reasoned on the lines suggested above came to the conclusion that, if toil they must, they should make their toil serve unto sanctification. Be that as it may, we gathered from a previous meditation that Almighty God led all of us by the hand, as pilgrims on the way to perfection. And the surest proof of being in the way of perfection is to toil in such a manner as will merit for us the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God; *in labore requies:* Thou art true rest in toil and sweat.

2. When we were yet in the world, the gradual development of our vocation revealed to us that our previous works had been done primarily for gain, that our own will had entered largely into them, and that the execution had been uneven or uncertain. As our vocation waxed stronger we felt that in the cloister our work would be primarily done for the glory of God, that our own will would be merged in that of our superiors, and that our toil would be well sustained until the summons came for our eternal repose. An indescribable feeling of exaltation possesses some ardent souls at the prospect of working for God alone in His consecrated home. Labour, which in the past was to them dreary and monotonous, becomes suddenly ennobled. Nay, the more menial, the more sordid and uncongenial it may be, the more it seems invested with sanctity. Such souls conjure up pictures of Bethlehem, of the dolorous sojourn in Egypt, of the workshop in Nazareth; and they long for the approach of the time in which their own works will be closely identified with those of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph.

And yet, with this ardent wish to labour for God there is—almost unconsciously—interwoven a longing for rest. It is rest of a kind that was not largely experienced before, and therefore its representation to the mind is not very definite. But it is there. For as we may be haunted by forebodings of evil, so may we be obsessed by presentiments of joy.

In the past, our experiences of rest were associated with sleep, change of scene or occupation, pleasant intercourse with congenial friends, amusements, and an occasional holiday. At rare intervals we enjoyed a more spiritual and therefore more serene repose. It stole over us when we had successfully resisted some strong temptation; when we practised a signal act of mortification or performed a notable act of charity; or, again, when our ordinary work was done from a supernatural motive. We did not then

analyze it; but now we apprehend that that higher and more satisfying form of rest was associated with something expressly done or suffered for the glory of the Supreme Master. The labour, the combat, or the act of mortification may have caused the brain to reel or the body to wince; it may have raised a barrier to physical repose and deprived us of our sleep, but, as the Holy Spirit of God was with us in our strivings for His greater glory, the soul enjoyed incomparable rest: *in labore requies*.

This was the rest we expected to find in the cloister. We may not have reasoned it out, but expectations were latent in our minds. They were built up by what we had read and heard of cloister traditions and by what we had witnessed of cloister methods. Our reading had made us aware that the spirit of all Religious Orders—especially of the great Benedictine Order—was *peace:* and peace is the truest form of rest. It is "the tranquillity of perfect order." Wherever cloister discipline is strong the aroma of peace fills chapel and choir, library and workshop, lecture-hall and recreation-room. Peace lights up the countenances of the Religious with radiance, refines the tones of their voices, moderates their steps, and gives weight to their deliberations. The world owes more than it cares to acknowledge to this spirit of peace and rest. But for its existence in the heyday of monastic life, how meagre would be our literature, how soulless our music, and how imperfect our culture! When, in all parts of Europe, the clash of arms distracted the minds of men from study; when the ploughshare was left for the sword; when lips were unattuned to song, because hearts—the sources of song—were broken; and when nations were drifting back into the savage state from which they had been wrested by Christianity, salvation for the world was being daily wrought in the hush of the cloister. In patient, restful fashion books were penned, lands were tilled, hymns of praise were sung, and the arts and crafts were exercised. Living in the world, the monks were not of the world; yet how well they understood what would be needed for reconstruction as nations and men awoke to the truth of the Gospel! And in the region of the purely spiritual life, what arid wastes we, even to-day, should have to traverse, were it not for the quiet culture of the monks of old, who transcribed the Bible and the works of the Fathers of the Church and transmitted to us the fruits of their own reflections—accompanied with a silent

warning to follow in their footsteps by labouring in such a manner as to merit peace and rest.

That the spirit of rest had not vanished from the cloister, even in this busy age, was our profound conviction when God blessed us with our vocation. This conviction arose from what we saw. In meeting monks and nuns we recognized in them a certain distinction of manner. It was separable from personal appearance, from age, and from culture. It suggested peace, calm, repose. It differed so much from the spirit of the world outside, that it attracted us—in spite of the existence of blemishes in those Religious, to which we could not be blind. Almost unconsciously we may have been won over to the service of God. St. Leonard of Port Maurice, the great Franciscan missioner of the eighteenth century, confessed that his vocation was due to the reverent and peaceful demeanour of the friars as they chanted Compline in the little church of St. Bonaventure in Rome.

3. At first sight, life in the cloister would seem to be wholly in opposition to rest, as it is understood in the outside world; but it is not really so. The Religious simply subordinates rest to labour, as he subordinates nature to grace. The fact that he acts in a very thorough fashion is no proof that he feels no need of physical rest. He knows that labour and rest are interdependent. Without conscientious labour there can be no satisfying rest, and *vice versa*. Work and rest are complementary to each other. "We must rest to work well, and work to be able to enjoy rest" (Lubbock). "Thou shalt labour now a little, and thou shalt find rest, yea, everlasting joy" (*Imitation*, bk. I., c. 25). The words of the *Imitation* explain the position of the Religious. They suggest that work in the cloister depends largely on the hope of everlasting rewards, and that, with these in view, work will be done in a penitential spirit. The idea is expanded in the Apocalypse: "And I heard a voice from heaven saying to me: Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord. From henceforth now, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; for their works follow them" (*Apoc.* xiv. 13).

We have been created so to live and work in this world as to merit through Jesus Christ everlasting rest in the world to come. Whatever measure of rest is enjoyed here below is to be regarded as a greater or lesser promise of the prolonged rest in store for us. If we are solicitous for merely natural rest and content ourselves

with it, we fall short of the standard set up for us by the Holy Spirit. May we not regard the standard as having been fixed, when our Blessed Lord besought His followers not to be solicitous with regard to food, drink, and raiment? For rest is closely interwoven with those bodily wants. And was not the higher standard insisted on when He mildly reproached the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemani: "What? Could you not watch one hour with me?" (*St. Matt.* xxvi. 40). The cloister conception of rest may be thus explained: Seek first the kingdom of heaven and its rest, and all other needful rest will be added unto you. The more supernatural our rest, the closer we approximate to the source of all rest. Its source is the Holy Spirit: *in labore requies.* They who rest in the Lord enjoy, even on earth, a foretaste of the sweets of heavenly repose.

This by no means excludes physical rest, nor does it forbid forms of rest in change of scene or in rational amusements; but it certainly regards almost as sacrilege rest or recreation that is of a decidedly worldly character. When the "old man" was put off in taking the religious habit, the ways of the old man were likewise abandoned. And the diversions of the world are not those of the Religious who wishes to rest in the Lord. The Religious who too readily complains of the lack of bodily rest and recreation is unfaithful to his early aspirations. He now seeks what he did not then expect to find. His early ambition was to seek God alone in labour, penance, and prayer, and, as we have already seen, his view of rest was supernatural. He had occasionally tasted its sweets, and was induced to long for more. If he now longs inordinately for mere natural rest it is to be feared that the substance will be bartered for the shadow. Should the cloister ever become a resting-place for the idle and the lover of ease, it would lose its right to exist. If its foundations are to stand, the shrine raised on them must be dedicated to prayer, penance, labour, and *supernatural* rest. Natural rest must ever be regarded as of secondary importance.

All of us are aware of the profound rest that is enjoyed in the consciousness of work having been done to the best of our ability. The greater the mental strain, the larger the expenditure of physical energy, and the longer the time spent over the task, the more contented the mind and the more profound our sleep. The curse of labour seems lost in the depths of our rest. There is a sense of complete satisfaction. This is true in the world even as in the cloister, for, as we have seen, rest is the complement of

labour. Yet notice a distinction: although the repose just described may satisfy the worldling, it cannot of itself content the true Religious. *His* repose cannot be satisfying unless he can conscientiously say that he has laboured for God—not for the world; for the glory of his Institute—not for self-interest; for the good of souls—not for gold; for heavenly merit—not for praise or honour; in a humble way—not seeking publicity; with everlasting rest in view—without solicitude for temporal rest. Labouring in this spirit of self-sacrifice, he is comforted by the Holy Spirit. It was thus our Blessed Lord, in His Sacred Humanity, laboured for the glory of His Father. In the same spirit did Mary and Joseph toil. The saints followed their example; we also must resolve ever to labour in the spirit of self-sacrifice if we wish to share in the repose vouchsafed to our glorious exemplars: *in labore requies.*

To obtain a true spirit of sacrifice we must season our labours with prayer. In the fifth chapter of his rule St. Francis enjoins his brethren to labour faithfully and devotedly, but in such a way that the spirit of prayer and devotion may not be extinguished—for to that spirit all temporal things should be subordinated. According to St. Bonaventure, work done in such a spirit is in itself a prayer, inasmuch as it is directed to the greater glory of God. Thus our labours will be in harmony with the wishes of our superiors, and we shall find it easier to banish temptations of pride and self-sufficiency. To the man of prayer the hardest labour seems easy and the heaviest burden light. He is an enigma to the worldly-minded, yet there is no mystery about his life; the text explains all. "Thou art true rest in toil and sweat." The Spirit of God descends on him, and his rest is so sweet as to partake of the peace that surpasseth all understanding. At the close of each day he, with great humility, says: "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (*St. John* xvii. 4); and he feels that the Holy Spirit whispers in response: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you" (*St. John* xiv. 27).

4. In the cloister, although mere physical rest and the amenities of life should not be sought with solicitude, they need not be despised or neglected. The religious state does not free a subject from the necessities of his human nature, and nature demands that physical rest be provided for. If the demand is ignored, the

foundations of spiritual rest will be undermined. In modern times these foundations are in very grave danger, and therefore it behoves all concerned to save them.

The first danger to spiritual rest comes from the abundance of the harvest of work and the fewness of the labourers. The Institute is invited on all sides by the ecclesiastical superiors to undertake new work or to establish new houses. Educational authorities are more and more exacting year by year with regard to the quantity and quality of school-work. Vocations are becoming rarer because of the increasing allurements of the world. The physique of aspirants to the cloister in these modern days is often not what it was even a quarter of a century ago. In these circumstances the greatest prudence must be used lest more work should be undertaken than can reasonably be done; for the price to be paid would be far too great if it meant the loss of spiritual rest through weakness of mind and body as the result of overwork.

The next danger to cloister rest is occasioned by those who introduce the hustling, bustling, restless spirit of the world. They wear the religious habit only to discredit it by their worldly manners. The habit in itself is suggestive of composure, but if the deportment of the wearer is of a purely professional or business character it becomes a caricature. This cannot be done without a feeling of unrest overtaking the community, for, underneath the restless, worldly bearing of such a Religious, there is a latent reproach to those who favour the time-honoured staidness of the cloister; and unmerited reproaches are destructive of peace of soul.

Other dangers to true rest lurk in the inconsiderate imitation of the great ascetics, whose lives were led under conditions very dissimilar to those of modern times. If health is impaired by indiscreet penance, the spirit of unrest will invade the soul. Much unrest to ourselves and others may also be occasioned by concealing our infirmities from our superiors; by lack of frankness with regard to our limitations, when some unusual work is proposed; or, again, by undertaking without permission extra duties which interfere with the work laid on us by obedience. Unrest is likewise caused by unbridled curiosity regarding the doings of the outside world, the intentions of our superiors, and the movements of our associates. But, perhaps, the most destructive agency against the spirit of claustral rest is that of meddlesomeness and fault-finding. He who says: "I must mind my own business,"

and who keeps that resolution, is the Religious who most surely finds rest in the Holy Spirit of God.

Our Founders have, in the Rule and Constitutions approved by the Church, made ample provision for physical and spiritual rest. Every detail of the *Order of the Day* is calculated to provide rest for the soul and body of truly observant Religious. Traditional customs, cloister courtesies, and the recreation in common, help the spirit of repose. If silence is religiously observed, vocal prayer fervently said, and meditation profitably made, the Spirit of God will rest on the house and will visit each individual soul. And where the Spirit of God is, *there* is true rest: *in labore requies*. On the contrary, where these observances are held in little esteem, the spirit of unrest enters in, and its victims find themselves in a more unenviable plight than before. For whereas, in the world, the lack of rest could be compensated for by recourse to amusements or by change of scene, the unhappy Religious—thrown upon themselves—find no compensation. By their perverseness they have hewn out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. Only the observant are refreshed by the waters of peace and rest in God.

The true Religious never makes his labours a pretext for neglect of prayer and meditation. No matter how pressing his work, he finds time for spiritual reading and for a private visit to the Blessed Sacrament. He would consider it a lasting disgrace to omit—even for a day—the recitation of his rosary; for he knows there can be no rest in the Spirit of God where even minor duties are neglected. He murmurs not against the busy age in which his lot is cast, remembering that God is the God of all the ages, and that He is ever the Divine Haven in which rest for the soul is found.

May we, in a similar spirit, leave our Retreat, determined to accept the yoke of toil with humble and generous hearts: "Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls" (*St. Matt.* xi. 29). Let all our work be done in the spirit of faith: "For we who have believed shall enter into rest" (*Heb.* iv. 3). Let our hope be like that of the royal Psalmist, who exclaims: "In peace, in the selfsame, I will sleep and I will rest: for thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope" (*Ps.* iv. 9, 10). Let the love of God so fill our souls that the hardest toil may seem easy and the heaviest burden light: "For my yoke is easy and my burden light" (*St. Matt.* xi. 30). This love of God is shown by labour-

ing for His glory, for the exaltation of Holy Church, for the honour of our Institute, for the conversion of sinners, the relief of the souls in Purgatory, and for our personal sanctification. Let us begin every important work with an invocation to the Holy Spirit, use frequent aspirations and ejaculations, seek the aid of our sweet mother Mary and our saintly patrons, stimulate our flagging energies by reflections on the constancy of the martyrs, and we shall find that the Holy Spirit is, in very truth, *requies in labore*.

Resting here below, we shall enjoy a foretaste of the heavenly rest that is in store for us: "There remaineth, therefore, a day of rest for the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, the same also hath rested from his works, as God did from his. Let us hasten therefore to enter into that rest" (*Heb.* iv. 9-11). "With thee is true rest and life undisturbed; he that enters into thee *enters into the joy of his Lord*. And he shall have nothing to fear, but shall be exceedingly well in the sovereign good" (St. Augustine, *Confessions*, bk. v., c. 10).

IX.—IN ÆSTU TEMPERIES

(Refreshment in the excess of heat.)

1. THE text recalls to our minds weary days and restless nights, for all of us have, in some degree or other, suffered from excess of heat. We have had experiences of sultry summers at home or of tropical heat abroad. Portions of our lives have been spent in unwholesome places, or we have laboured and studied under harassing conditions. Some of us may be reminded of burning fevers in which languid yearnings for refreshment developed into frenzied demands. In those distressing situations even temporary relief was welcomed as a new lease of life, for we had heard of cases in which want of relief meant certain death.

Such memories attune our minds to sympathy for those who, either physically or spiritually, are exposed to enervating heats. We pity the poor collier cramped and confined in the labyrinth of the mine; the furnace man almost melting away through exposure to fiery blasts; the stoker immured in what may be called a floating purgatory. We pity *all* who earn their bread under hard conditions, or who are "sweated" in the interests of the tyrannical or the avaricious. Pity holds us spell-bound as we gaze in reverie on the martyrs of old. We see them dimly through the fierce flames which, although reducing their bodies to cinders, could not quench their indomitable spirit. But we pity most those who in search of heavenly bliss have to struggle through the torrid zone of strong passions. Physically, excess of heat can destroy the body only, but spiritually speaking misdirected and uncontrolled passions may precipitate both soul and body into Hell. And, so, far from contenting ourselves with pitying those who are subjected to oppressive heat in the natural order, our hearts should go out to all who are sorely tried in a spiritual sense. For we may regard it as certain that, hour by hour, millions of souls are in danger of being consumed by the fierce flames of passion. Those flames, if unrestrained, are portents of the flames of Hell. Lovers of the Crucified cannot contemplate such a picture without emotion. Their souls are at once full of compassion for those who struggle, and of determination so to moderate the ardour of their own passions as to keep them in a state of servitude, for only as servitors are his passions profitable to man.

The passions are gifts from on high which may either profit or hurt the soul according as they are used or abused. Every gift of God is meant to serve man's advantage, but the beneficent results are dependent on the fulfilment of conditions. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose, therefore, life, that both thee and thy seed may live" (*Deut.* xxx. 19). In the physical order God provides abundantly for the wants of man, on condition that he uses his reason and exercises his will-power on correct lines. "The earth is full of the mercy of the Lord" (*Ps.* xxxiii. 5). If he tempt God by presuming on His mercy or by overstepping the limits of prudence, he does so at his own risk. He who deliberately builds his house on the edge of a crater cannot blame Divine Providence if, sooner or later, the foundations are swept away by the rushing lava. If man, forsaking the solid earth, emulates the birds of the air or the fishes of the sea, the disasters that probably await him are of his own seeking. Man's dominion over nature is powerful, but far from absolute. Although it has, with the flight of ages, become extended, it nevertheless remains limited. The commission given by God to rule is still valid, but the Divine suzerainty has never been suspended. "And let him have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and the fowls of the air, and the beasts, and the whole earth, and every creeping creature that moveth upon the earth" (*Gen.* i. 26). "Thine, O Lord, is magnificence and power, and glory, and victory; and to thee is praise: for all that is in heaven and in earth is thine: thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art above all princes. Thine are riches, and thine is glory, thou hast dominion over all, in thy hand is power and might: in thy hand, greatness, and the empire of all things" (1 *Paral.* xxix. 11, 12).

Not only has God blessed His rational creatures with marvellous gifts, but He has also endowed them with almost miraculous powers of adaptability to climatic changes and to hard conditions of life. He delights in coming to their aid in their struggles with the forces of nature, but He has never, either in the physical or the spiritual order, sanctioned or blessed foolhardy enterprises that were the outcome of man's arrogance or ambition. "He who loves the danger shall perish in the danger." God loves to hear from the lips of His true adorers the strains of the Canticle sung of old by the three youths in the fiery furnace: "All ye works of the Lord, bless the Lord: praise and exalt him above all for ever. . . . O ye sun and moon, bless the Lord: O ye stars of heaven, bless the

Lord. . . . O ye fire and heat, bless the Lord. . . . O ye spirits and souls of the just, bless the Lord: O ye holy and humble of heart, bless the Lord" (*Dan.* iii. *passim*). These reflections are necessary because of the proneness of the passions so to puff up and exalt man as to make him unmindful that to God he owes all he has and all he hopes for. When he is duly mindful of the providence of God and humble in the acknowledgment of His bounty, God often sends him refreshment far beyond his most sanguine expectations. Many of the recorded miracles are due to this loving intervention of Almighty God.

Samson, wellnigh spent with fatigue, had his thirst slaked with the waters that issued from a tooth in the jawbone of an ass: "And when he had drunk them, he refreshed his spirit, and recovered his strength" (*Judg.* xv. 19). When Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago were cast with their feet bound into a furnace "heated seven times more than it had been accustomed to be heated . . . the angel of the Lord went down with Azarias and his companions into the furnace, and he drove the flame of fire out of the furnace, and made the midst of the furnace like the blowing of a wind bringing dew, and the fire touched them not at all, nor troubled them, nor did them any harm" (*Dan.* iii. 19, 49, 50). In the Third Book of Kings, chap. xviii., we read that Elias, through the bounty of God, obtained abundance of refreshing rain from Heaven.

2. In the moral order, persecutions, trials, and temptations are equivalent to searching fire and heat in the physical order. They tax to the utmost the soul's powers of endurance. Here again the Holy Spirit of God brings refreshment to the sufferers. The fires of persecution that consumed the bodies of the martyrs were tempered with such refreshment for the soul as enabled the victims to sing a *Te Deum*, whose jubilant strains were heard high above the crackling of the faggots. Our Blessed Saviour cast out devils whose scorching breath had kindled the fire of madness in the possessed. But miracles are not multiplied without necessity. God for the most part contents Himself with inviting us to cooperate with Him in the working out of His wise laws. When the Divine invitation is heeded, our souls are replenished with all the refreshment needed for the renewal of their powers, for those powers are in constant danger of being weakened and diverted from their true end because of the downward tendency of our fallen

nature. It is here that we find ourselves confronted with the marvellous power of the passions for weal or for woe. It is here that so many souls make shipwreck of their graces—swallowed up in a raging sea of fire: the fire of unruly passions. God, who entrusts them to our keeping, is ever near to assist us in moderating their ardour or in turning that ardour to righteous ends. He who neglects the Divine assistance does so at his peril, for man, unaided by grace, cannot control those impetuous forces. Mastery over the passions means heroism; and sanctity is heroism. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans comments on the excess of heat caused by the passions, and points to the only source from which refreshment can flow: "I find then a law, that when I have a will to do good, evil is present with me. For I am delighted with the law of God, according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, fighting against the law of my mind, and captivating me in the law of sin that is in my members. Unhappy man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death? *The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord*" (*Rom.* vii. 21-25).

Self-love is the generating principle of all the excesses of the passions. Man should regard all persons and things outside of God and Heaven as so much dross, except in so far as they conduce to God's greater glory and the everlasting welfare of the lover: "For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (*St. Matt.* viii. 36, 37). The character of a man can be gauged from the passion by which he is ruled, or by the manner in which he deals with a passion that strives for mastery, for the passion that rules is, for the time being, the whole man. It takes its orders from headquarters—*i.e.*, from the love of good or evil that reigns in the heart. Hence, the passion that predominates is rightly called the ruling passion. It is of course man himself who rules, for his freedom of will makes him arbiter of his destiny; but a predominating passion has occasionally such powerful influence over the will as to shake its freedom to its foundations. Thus we read of crimes being perpetrated by men who were not responsible for their actions. For although the passions intensify voluntariness, they lessen deliberation, and, consequently, lessen man's freedom. In the cases just mentioned, passion swayed the will so strongly as to unhinge its power of full deliberation. Such an event is little less than a catastrophe. It means —for the moment—a fall from man's high estate as a rational

creature to the low level of the irrational brute: "And man, when he was in honour, did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them" (*Ps.* xlviii. 13).

If such perversion can happen in the hey-day of life, when man is in full possession of his vigour, we need not be surprised that "the ruling passion is strong in death." It could not be otherwise, for as a man lives so shall he die. Short of a miracle, the passion that has been fostered in the vigour of life cannot be defeated when vigour is waning. This impressive truth should lead us to a swift and sure decision to be really masters of our souls, by keeping within bounds the passion that threatens to enslave us. The longer we delay, the stronger and more masterful that passion will become. The evils of excess of heat in the material order are as nothing compared with the calamities that overtake the slaves of passion in the domain of the spirit. No volcano rages more fiercely than a soul possessed by the passion of pride, lust, hatred, avarice, envy, or jealousy. If, by the exercise of ordinary foresight and the employment of means abundantly to hand, a person could prevent the spread of a conflagration, we should regard him either as a maniac or a criminal if he remained inactive when danger threatened. What, then, can be thought of the Religious who sleeps at his post when the fire of passion threatens to consume the virtues, graces, and merits gained through the Precious Blood? The work of such a Religious may be elevated in its nature and fruitful in good results; he may by his varied labours gain many souls to Christ; great may be his gifts and wide his sphere of influence; but unless he chain himself down to the drudgery of the most ordinary soul by combating his predominant passion, he is but preparing for himself a huge funeral pyre. Only by daily prayer, self-examination, and meditation can the soul be awake to its dangers. Only by constant mortification and penance can the senses be restrained from bursting into flame. The Holy Spirit of God will send refreshment in the excess of heat, but only when the appointed conditions of prayer, good works, and the Sacraments are recognized and fulfilled.

Let no Religious be so vain as to imagine that elevation to honours, the holiness of the task assigned to him, long perseverance in the service of God, or prolonged freedom from temptation, emancipates him from the stern discipline to which every child of Adam who would save his soul must submit. The contrary is the exact truth.

From him to whom much has been given much will be expected. The Religious who relaxes in vigilance will find to his cost that frail, fallen human nature will prove unequal to the task of moderating the flames of passion. Every epoch in the history of the Church has witnessed the fall of the stars from heaven. Every state in the Church has mourned over victims. The historical examples that we know should rise up before us as pillars of fire to warn us of personal danger: "Wherefore, he that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 *Cor.* x. 12).

3. From their very name (Latin, *passio:* suffering, endurance) we gather that the passions point to a goal that can be reached only through searching fire. When the passions are rightly used it is a fire that purifies; when abused it is one which destroys. Let us repeat that they are implanted by the Creator as powerful aids in the working out of our sanctification. On our sanctification depends our everlasting happiness. Man cannot but seek happiness; it is the goal of his self-love. He may conjure up a make-believe happiness instead of the reality proposed by Almighty God, but he must have a goal. The passions drive towards the goal. The goal of the natural man is self-indulgence, that of the spiritual man is God: and all that the possession of God stands for. In both men the passions are similar; but whereas in the natural man they, in practice, become ends in themselves, in the spiritual man they are constantly regarded as mere means to an end: "We are debtors, not to the flesh to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you shall die. But if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh you shall live" (*Rom.* viii. 12, 13). "The just man liveth by faith" (*Rom.* i. 17). "A hot soul is a burning fire: it will never be quenched until it devour something" (*Ecclus.* xxiii. 22). Such a soul is the one which is overruled by an unholy passion. "If thou wilt give to thy soul her desires, she will make thee a joy to thy enemies" (*Ecclus.* xviii. 31). "Every man is tempted by his own concupiscence, being drawn away and allured" (*St. Jas.* i. 14).

Self-love, then, leads us to devote ourselves to all that contributes to our real or imaginary happiness. It is the primary appetite in man. It harmonizes with his sensitive inclinations. It leads the spiritual man to marshal all his forces on the side of God, for God is regarded as the source and end of all his happiness in time and eternity. It leads the natural man to range his forces on the side

of mental or sensuous gratification, for to him supernatural happiness makes no appeal. *Hatred* is the opposite of love. It means displeasure with all that is opposed to man's aims and affections. Thus the man who is guided by supernatural motives hates all that bars the way to the heavenly goal, no matter how his lower self may suffer. The natural man, on the contrary, hates only that which is in opposition to his earthly desires, and even hates those who, with charitable intention, remind him of his folly.

From love and hatred spring all the other passions. *Desire* is a movement of the soul towards the object of one's love—leading the spiritual man towards supernatural goods and the worldly-minded towards the things of earth. "If you be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God: mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth" (*Col.* iii. 1, 2). *Aversion* means a recoil from the object hated. It withdraws the man of God from sin and its occasions, and fills the carnal man with distaste for virtue and for its votaries. *Joy* signifies rest and peace in the possession of what is desired. The spiritual delight in the Lord, who is their "reward exceeding great" (*Gen.* xv. 1). "And your joy no man shall take from you" (*St. John* xvi. 22). The carnal-minded cry, "Peace, peace," and there is no peace. "There is no peace to the wicked, saith the Lord" (*Isa.* lvii. 21). *Sadness* follows the loss of a desired object, or the presence of one detested. The man of God is sad only when he fears he has incurred the Divine displeasure; the carnal man grieves when he is deprived of what ministers to his bodily comfort or his pleasures.

The passions just enumerated are called concupiscible passions, because *desire* is of their very essence. Hope, despair, fear, courage, and anger are called irascible passions, because their exercise demands greater effort. It must be remembered that, although the passions are strictly identified with the sensitive appetite, they are nevertheless spoken of (in connection with acts of the will) as *rational* appetites. Modern writers understand by passions or appetites, organic needs represented in consciousness of certain sensations. Thus hunger, thirst, sleep, need of exercise, need of air, and the sexual instinct come within their scope, and the result is that the names of well-known unruly passions are at once suggested to the mind—*i.e.*, gluttony, intemperance, sloth, and lust. Then, if we think of man's instinct of self-development and self-preservation, pride, vanity, envy, jealousy, ambition, selfishness, and

avarice will readily occur to the mind as "excesses of heat" in the spiritual order.

4. Now that we behold the array of forces put at our disposal by Almighty God, it behoves us to study how to use them to the best advantage. It depends on ourselves whether they shall be used for or against the loving Father who has committed them to our care. Remembering that self-love is the predominating force within us, we should ask ourselves whether we are striving daily to live according to righteousness. A single false move may cause a great conflagration. So close is the affinity between the passions that if one be aroused the others cannot remain dormant. Righteous self-love assigns to God the chief place in our affections, and makes all other beings subservient. It controls and disciplines our desires, hopes, fears, aversions, and all other appetites. It meditates on the Divine Law, humbles itself in prayer, crucifies the flesh, and refreshes and strengthens itself with the Sacraments. While our fallen human nature is ever seeking to fan into raging flames the appetites within us, righteous self-love, by adopting the foregoing means, obtains such refreshment from on high as moderates all unholy ardour. Great indeed is the intensity of love in the souls of the elect of God: it is an all-consuming fire; but it is a fire which destroys only what is base.

The entire discipline of the cloister is, under God, well calculated to moderate passions which might otherwise run riot. So much is this the case that grave danger might be run if Religious did not pause to consider the evil effects of unrestrained passion. Sheltered and protected as they are, they might fail to realize that within themselves are all the elements that make for disaster unless they are duly controlled. Day by day, they, by the neglect of little things, may be preparing the way for such a conflagration as may be difficult to extinguish. For unruly passions are often engendered in ignorance, nurtured by neglect, and realized to exist only when they unexpectedly burst forth. It sometimes happens that the last to know that the house is on fire is the owner—snugly at rest in bed. Outsiders have long before seen the smoke and the flames. So our neighbours may behold in us passions of which we are unconscious. It is only thus that we can account for some of the strange things that happen in the cloister. For years a community may be tortured or annoyed by the unseemly behaviour of some member. Retreats

are preached, meditations are made, spiritual books are read, but all to no purpose. The unruly passion is known by all around, but the victim remains unconscious of its existence. This could not happen if the daily examinations of conscience were treated as great realities. He who practises the particular examen cannot long remain ignorant of his predominant failing, for, as we have said before, it is, for the time being, his very self. And if the general examen be faithfully made each evening, the predominant failing will surely arrest attention, for, amidst one's daily faults, it is the sin which is always present and at work. Other failings are intermittent; the ruling passion is identified with the failing that is ever being repeated.

Far from contenting ourselves with its discovery, we should bestir ourselves in preventing its growth. We cannot hope to uproot the passions, for they are inherent in our human nature, but we can and should train them to support the soul in its upward flights. They are bad masters, but may be made excellent servants. Our success in controlling them will depend largely on the remembrance of the fact that, human as we are, bodily conditions must be considered as well as those affecting the soul. Much time is lost and energy wasted through inadvertence to, or ignorance of, this truth. In combating the unruly tendencies of the passions, it cannot be too much insisted on that health and disease, heredity and environment, rest and diet, air and water, cleanliness and order—in one word, *all* that affects mind and body —must be considered. While prayer and the other means of grace must be put in the forefront of the means employed, a successful issue can be hoped for only by availing ourselves of all the natural aids at our disposal. An unholy passion can often be traced to some bodily neglect or to contempt of the elementary laws of health. The body is as much the work of God as the soul. To suppose that passions can be moderated by living and acting as if one were composed only of spirit is to wander in dreamland, and one day there is likely to be a rude awakening. The loss of mental balance is, amongst spiritual people, most frequently due to neglect of the truth now insisted on. If the requirements of the body are ruled absolutely out of court, fuel will be added to the fire invariably provided by fallen nature. For the moderation of that fire, and for the obtaining of refreshment in excess of heat, the Holy Spirit would have us profit by reason and experience. Reason tells us that a being composed of soul and

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body must study the needs of both. Experience proves to us that when this is conscientiously done the Holy Spirit of God comes to our assistance and prevents the flames of passion from destroying His work in our souls. Nay! directed into proper channels, these passions purify, ennoble, and sanctify. The senses are sobered, the intellect is illumined, the heart is strengthened, the soul is more alive to the sweets of spirituality, for the soul sees more clearly the folly of living for anything outside of God. It hungers for union. It revels in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; and God, finding the house of the soul purified and garnished, enters in and takes up His abode. His presence means refreshment, and during His stay no unworthy passion shall desolate with excess of heat.

For our encouragement we should ponder often on the splendid victories won by some of the saints who, in their early lives, had been the victims of unruly passions. The names of King David, St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Margaret of Cortona, and St. John of God will readily occur to the mind. We know how fiercely passion burned within them, but we also know how refreshment came through the merits of our Beloved Saviour. The same Holy Spirit who refreshed them is ever prepared to come to our assistance if we ask with confidence and co-operate with constancy.

X.—IN FLETU SOLATIUM

(Solace in our grief.)

1. GRIEF is closely associated with loss. Our lives, in their social aspect, are intertwined with all kinds of interests. Our comfort, nay, our very existence, largely depends on material things. Our success or failure is influenced by our friendships. The very spot where we earn our bread has its power for good or for evil. Hence the loss of anything that has entered into our life means a wrench, greater or lesser according to its relationship with our interests. The child, who lives in toyland, suffers real grief when it loses its cherished possessions. Peasants torn away or driven off from their old homesteads refuse for a long time to admit that there can be anything good in the land of exile. A broken friendship means not rarely a broken heart. Loss of fortune has in some cases occasioned the loss of reason.

As every human heart is susceptible to its attacks, grief has a wide field for its operations. For no human life can run its course without suffering loss, and loss means grief. The reader is doubtless reminded of many personal experiences. Has he not regretted lost opportunities, mourned over departed friends, grieved over shattered hopes? The grief occasioned by those losses may long since have subsided; but furrowed brows, hair streaked with grey, and a certain toning down of the old indomitable spirit bear witness to its strength in the past. For a man to confess that he has never grieved would be to dishonour himself. It would mean that his reason had been less active than instinct in beasts and birds. How sad the moanings of the beast when its young have been stolen! How piteous the cries of the mother-bird when the nest is robbed of her fledglings! If a man grieves over loss, he proves to the world that he has a heart of flesh rather than of stone. Grief, far from being a sign of weakness, is rather a testimony to man's appreciation of values and to his unselfishness. His grief shows that he has studied persons and things in relationship to his own life. His valuation may not always be correct, but inasmuch as it has passed through his reason there is every hope that he will soon see aright. But the man who is impervious to grief, who remains unmoved while thousands around him mourn, is a modern imitator of Nero, who is said to have amused himself while Rome

was burning. He is as little human as he is Christlike. He dissociates himself from the noblest characters in history. He has no part with the saints. How, then, can he find favour with God? "Mercy to him who shows mercy."

Grief is suggestive of tears. Thus it is that in Scripture we find abundant references to weeping, as synonymous with mourning, grief, and sorrow. Grief, however, may be so overwhelming as to dry up the fountain of tears and paralyze the organs of speech. "And they [the three friends of Job] sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no man spoke to him a word: for they saw that his grief was very great" (*Job* ii. 13).

The following quotations from Holy Scripture show how men of the strongest character became a prey to grief without suffering any loss of their dignity. On hearing of the supposed death of Joseph, "Jacob, tearing his garments, put on sackcloth, mourning for his son a long time . . . and he continued weeping" (*Gen.* xxxvii. 34). When the tidings of the death of Absalom reached King David: "The king, therefore, being much moved, went up to the high chamber over the gate, and wept. And as he went he spoke in this manner: "My son Absalom; Absalom, my son; would to God that I might die for thee, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom" (2 *Kings* xviii. 33). From this background of grief King David stands out in nobler relief than when he marched at the head of conquering hosts. And when he exclaims: "O Lord, the God of my salvation: I have cried in the day, and in the night before thee" (*Ps.* lxxxvii. 2), "For I did eat ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping. Because of thy anger and indignation: for having lifted me up, thou hast thrown me down" (*Ps.* ci. 10, 11), is not the psalmist more lovable than when he proudly seeks to have his people numbered? How he wins our sympathy as a man of God when he exclaims: "I have laboured in my groanings, every night I will wash my bed; I will water my couch with my tears" (*Ps.* vi. 7)! For the man of God is he who empties himself of self so that God may dwell in him. And God, entering into David's soul, encourages him to say: "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity: for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping" (*Ps.* vi. 9). His grief has made him strong and mighty against the unrighteous.

In sorrowing over our losses we have the sanction of our Blessed Lady, who, with St. Joseph, sought the Divine Child: "And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple . . .

and his mother said to him : Son, why hast thou done so to us ? behold thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (*St. Luke* ii. 46-48). Above all, we have the ever-memorable example of Christ, who, in visiting Bethany, found the hamlet moved because of the death of Lazarus. How reassuring for all who mourn are the touching Scriptural words : "Jesus, therefore, when he saw her weeping, and the Jews that were come with her, weeping, groaned in the spirit, and troubled himself, and said : Where have you laid him ? They say to him, Lord, come and see. And Jesus wept" (*St. John* xi. 33-35). Internal grief with its outward manifestation is therefore perfectly conformable to Christian and religious perfection. When controlled by right reason, they are testimonies to depth of feeling that makes us more like to the Master and to those who loved Him best.

2. In the Book of Psalms we read : "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy" (*Ps.* cxxv. 5). The harvest is sometimes so abundant as to suggest miraculous help. Saints have been loud in their professions that the measure of their joy was out of all proportion to their tears and sorrows.

Numberless men, heirs to wealth and accustomed to ease, have never realized themselves, until bereft of their heritage and forced to earn their bread in the sweat of their brow. Whilst resting on the lap of luxury their lives contributed nothing to God's glory nor to the well-being of their fellow-men. Poor and grief-stricken, they found a treasure far more precious than what they had lost.

They found themselves ! Powers that had been slumbering were now awakened and exercised. Gifts that had been squandered were now turned to spiritual and temporal profit. The poor, who had been despised, were now honoured as brethren. Bitter, indeed, was their humiliation in the early days of loss, and deep, though silent, their grief; but they lived to bless God a thousand times over for the compensation in finding themselves.

Priests and nuns familiar with parochial visitation will recall to mind instances in which entire families were saved from spiritual destruction through the purifying process of grief. In the days of their prosperity, neglect of religion in those families was a public scandal. Like beggars on horseback they were riding to the devil. Caught by some great reverse of fortune or humbled by some excess, they were at once chastened and ennobled. They arose, and found themselves on a lowly road that led more surely

to the eternal goal. They had hitherto run after false gods—the gods of worldly prosperity and pleasure; now they realized that their real life should be the service of the One True Living God.

Looking into our own hearts we may find many excellent results due to some past grief. The grief caused by the loss of a valued friend may have revealed to us the secret of Christ's anguish in finding Himself abandoned by those who had sworn fealty. Perhaps *we* had neglected His service in the interests of the world? Our constancy may date from that hour of trial. Consciousness of the certain loss of sanctifying grace in some dark hour of passion, and agonizing grief when light broke in on the soul, may have transformed us from weak and vacillating mortals to men and women of strong decisions where God's honour is at stake. By the graveside seeds of grief are sown that may fructify unto a thorough conversion to God, or to decision on the part of those who have hitherto wavered with regard to their true vocation.

Sources of grief are sometimes so mysterious as to suggest the intervention of a special providence. Painstaking work is foreordained to failure; misunderstandings altogether inexplicable arise between the best friends; reputed saints are repelled from each other through strange aversions; administrators, preachers, or teachers, are unceremoniously removed from congenial work, which is evidently successful, to conditions where they face the unknown—nay, where they may read the legend: "Abandon hope, ye who enter here." In these and in all other circumstances that occasion grief, happy the Religious who can pray thus: "O God, in all our past miseries we love to trace the working of Thy special providence in our regard. But for Thy gracious care we might have strayed from Thy side. When our minds were drawn towards other goals than Thy heavenly kingdom, when our hearts were drawn to other loves than Thine, when our souls were centred only on self, and when we were thus hastening to the brink of a precipice, Thou didst mercifully intervene to save us. Misunderstanding the true nature of Thy fatherly love and care, we murmured and wept; but now, O God, chastened, humbled, docile, and enlightened, we kiss the hand that chastened us, and we adore the Divine heart that comforted our own poor hearts in the hour of loss."

3. It is to be regretted that grief, instead of chastening and ennobling the soul, sometimes plunges it into the depths of

melancholy or despair, and thus renders it despicable. This may happen when persons and things meant by God to be helps in our strivings are, contrariwise, regarded as essentials. They may be clung to and idolized almost to the exclusion of the Supreme Giver. Now God is a jealous God, and justly so. He cannot suffer Himself to be thrust into the background of our affection. He must have the first place: "I am the Lord, and there is none else: there is no God besides me" (*Isa.* xlv. 5). "I will not give my glory to another, nor my praise to graven things" (*Isa.* xlii. 8).

Those who allow their lives to be too slavishly bound up with creatures or with their duties or environment are greatly to be pitied. No harvest of joy awaits them. Their sowings are destroyed by the blindness, selfishness, or worldliness of their attachments. The Spirit of God has had no part in their attachments, and when friends, or fortune, or honours are torn away, their souls are empty. Had Divine grace spiritualized the friendship, or moderated the attachment, the loss of one or the other would have been more than compensated for by the heavenly solace bestowed when God deigns to visit His elect. "For thou art not delighted in our being lost, because after a storm thou makest a calm, and after tears and weeping thou pourest in joyfulness" (*Tob.* iii. 22). The souls we have now in view are void of that gladness of heart which, according to the Book of Proverbs, maketh a cheerful countenance. "A glad heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by grief of mind the spirit is cast down" (*Prov.* xv. 13). Their inordinate attachments have concealed from them the source of true and lasting comfort. Their grief, when separation comes, is equally inordinate. It is selfish. It is unholy. It blinds them to the desolation of Christ, who, hanging on the cross, vainly seeks to draw their eyes to Himself. It makes them deaf to His entreaty: "Oh, all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow" (*Lam.* i. 12).

Such souls lose sight of the Fatherhood of God, who punishes His children only with a view to their amendment. The sweetness of the Eternal Father's presence is lost through the bitterness of spirit occasioned by the absence of creatures. They fail to see what a doubtful and dangerous compliment they pay the creature in putting him in the place of God. "For my people have done two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can

hold no water" (*Jer.* ii. 13). They perceive not the insult they offer God, in preferring their own whims and fancies to His Divine will. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood" (*Isa.* i. 3). They brood over the injury done them, and fail to realize that it is God's inscrutable way of rendering signal service, if they will only endure separation or loss with submission. "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into joy: thou hast cut my sackcloth, and hast compassed me with gladness" (*Ps.* xxix. 12). Behold the merciful intentions of the Heavenly Father in every affliction that He sends or sanctions. Those who give themselves up to uncontrollable grief run the risk of losing not only friends or fortune, but the eternal God and His kingdom. Oh, that those poor stricken souls could realize the goodness of God to all who even *try* to love Him! Oh that in their trials they remembered the Scriptural words: "Be you humbled therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in the time of visitation: casting all your care upon him, for he hath care of you" (1 *St. Pet.* v. 6, 7).

Grief truly is a great searcher of souls. For good or for evil how mighty is its power! How efficacious it may be in cleansing us from the stains of worldliness, or, if borne with a bad spirit, how it may degrade all our works! As grief shadows every child of Adam, it behoves us to choose whether we shall make it available for spiritual life or for death: "I call heaven and earth to witness, this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing. Choose therefore life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (*Deut.* xxx. 19). Grief, borne in union with the Sorrows of Jesus and Mary, means everlasting life and all its attendant blessings. Grief uncontrolled, gloomy, and despairing, means the blight of all the flowers of grace that God would fain sow in the soul: it means death. Oh, let us resolve so to restrain our merely natural feelings as to merit Divine consolation. Our grief will then be Christlike. It will enable us, who have hitherto sown in tears, to reap in joy.

> Lo, comfort blooms on pain, and peace on strife,
> And gain on loss.
> What is the key to everlasting life?
> A blood-stained cross.
>
> JOYCE KILMER.

4. Our reflections have for the most part been confined to the grief occasioned through temporal misfortunes. We have seen

how largely it enters into the life of man. Thus it is that character may be understood through the knowledge of one's attitude towards grief. It brings one individual into the foreground as a hero, and drives another into the background as a coward. Turning to the study of grief in its relationship to the spiritual life, we find similar results. In one soul grief works unto sanctification; in another unto reprobation. It behoves us, therefore, to find out whether our dispositions under the influence of grief are likely to bring a blessing or a curse. The grief of King David, the tears of the Magdalen, and the weeping of St. Peter, won for them such Divine solace as helped to sanctify them. They sowed in tears; they reaped in joy. The grief of Judas, on the other hand, was but a preliminary to despair. Bitter as was the grief of St. Augustine over his past sins, it was sweeter to him than the pleasure that had gratified his senses. The partial blindness of St. Francis, caused by weeping over his faults, was more than compensated for by deep spiritual insight.

In the supernatural, as in the natural order, grief is occasioned by the loss of what was held in high esteem. More than once in this Retreat have we reflected on the spiritual wealth of a soul in the grace of God. The Holy Spirit dwells therein. It is holy and justified, and its every act may be meritorious of a new degree of glory in the next life. Its life on earth is as joyous and peaceful as it can be, consistently with the limitations imposed by its imprisonment in an impressionable body, and by its exposure to the temptations of the world and the Evil One. Although conscious of its weakness, it nevertheless feels its strength: "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me" (*Phil.* iv. 13). It is not insensible to physical pain nor freed from the haze of ignorance; neither is it safe from the possibility of failure, but it rejoices in the possession of a happiness which transcends all that the world can give. It knows and feels that it belongs to God; that it is heir, according to hope, of everlasting life, and that it is a privileged member of Holy Church. Its possessions are exceeding great. They could not be purchased by the wealth of the world. They are the result of the Precious Blood of Christ: "For you are bought with a great price" (1 *Cor.* vi. 20).

Consider this soul deprived of all its spiritual treasure by one fateful act. A sinful thought, a word, a deed, a desire may suffice. So long as the matter is theologically grave, that it has been freely accepted by the judgment, and that it has been done with full deliberation, the once favoured soul is now indescribably

poor. Not only have its spiritual possessions been swept away, but its power to merit is nullified so long as it remains in the unhappy state of mortal sin. The soul is empty and it *feels* its emptiness. While the round of daily duty is being done, even mixing with crowds, it feels lonely, stricken, and outcast. Like the prodigal, the sinner begins to be in want, and no one gives unto him. No one but the outraged God can restore those lost possessions. The closer the union of that poor soul with God in the days of its integrity, the greater the wrench occasioned by separation. The higher its flight towards the perfection of its state, the lower its fall. The sweeter its joy in the past, the more bitter its grief in the hour of loss. The deeper its former peace, the more profound its present remorse.

In charity we should pray that fallen souls may become deeply conscious of their loss, for it is the consciousness of loss that unseals the fountain of grief. On the direction of the tide of grief may depend an eternity of weal or woe; it may either carry the fallen soul on its bosom and land him on the shore of bliss, or it may sweep him into the whirlpool of despair. When man has once ardently loved Almighty God and finds himself outcast through his sin, his first impulse is to lose hope. Judas-like, he feels that he has betrayed innocent blood: Judas-like, he is tempted to despair. The greater the favours heaped on him by God, the deeper his grief and depression over his failure. Oh, it is indeed an anxious moment for the angels of God, and for men of goodwill on earth, for only the angels and such men realize the value of the human soul. It is a moment in which the Holy Spirit of God, rejected though He has been, makes use of the soul's consciousness of loss to excite such wholesome grief as will be meritorious. Would that all of us had hearts more sensitive to the possibilities of that awful hour in which a soul loses God! We too often come to the conclusion that there is no hope of redemption. We pretend to be more just than the very God who is offended. We forget the words of our Divine Saviour: "There shall be joy in heaven upon one sinner that doth penance, more than upon ninety-nine just who need not penance" (*St. Luke* xv. 7). Were the Holy Spirit as relentless as we, how few sinners would have their grief turned into joy! How seldom the angels would have occasion to rejoice!

The grief-stricken soul, abandoned perhaps by all his former friends, finds *One* who does not forget. "Can a woman forget

her infant? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee" (*Isa.* xlix. 15). Texts often heard or read float like soothing music through memory: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked man turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways" (*Ezech.* xxxiii. 11). "For the Lord is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil" (*Joel* ii. 13). The soul's grief is not lessened but sanctified. It is offered to God as a sacrifice for sin, in union with the sorrow of the God-Man. The Holy Spirit, true to His Divine mission as the Comforter, pours the balm of solace into the wounds of the penitent: *In fletu solatium.* The poor penitent now realizes that there is no relish in sin. He is convinced that no one but God can afford him real comfort. He is humble. He is grateful. He is saved. A greater miracle is wrought than if the dead were raised to life. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart: and he will save the humble of spirit" (*Ps.* xxxiii. 19).

5. It cannot be too much insisted on that the benefit of grief depends on the soul's knowledge of what was lost by mortal sin. The prolonged grief of the great penitents honoured by the Church was due to their remembrance of the dangers they had run in leaving the Lord their God. The Hell that they had escaped seemed always open to their tearful eyes. The Precious Blood that they had temporarily ignored was now adored in its saving power. The memory of wasted years, and squandered graces, and lost merits, stimulated their grief and urged them on to deeds of reparation. If we have followed them in their strayings, we must imitate them in their return and in the duration of our sorrow. Like them, we must regard it as part of our vocation to grieve over the sins of the world. Constant meditation on the value of the soul can alone beget this spirit. It is a spirit which destroys selfishness and fosters self-sacrifice. It invests the most ordinary actions with a new dignity, and draws the soul irresistibly to the Sacred Heart.

Even in the cloister penitents may be found whose grief over past sins is shallow and fitful. How widely they differ from the saints! Imitation of the saints need not be so literal as to lead to the writing of Confessions, as in the case of St. Augustine, or to the proclaiming of one's sins to the populace, like St. Margaret of Cortona: yet the spirit of sorrow should be abiding; and there

should be evidence of its reality. True grief consists not in empty protestations, nor is it the same as gloom or melancholy. It consists rather in meekness under humiliation; in an indefinable subduedness of spirit, which bridles in passions that were responsible for past failures; in a growing love of the Crucified, who has so mercifully restored what was lost; in deep sympathy for tried and tempted souls; in solicitude for the conversion of obstinate sinners, and in deep and lasting sorrow over the sins of the world. Such were the qualities found in the grief of the great penitents in past ages. They are the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There is about them an aroma of peace, an atmosphere of joy. Deep and lifelong was the grief of those great penitents, but their hope was deeper still. Bitter, indeed, was their humiliation, but it was more than compensated for by the signal favours granted them by God. And, indeed, one of the most remarkable things in the history of Christianity is the selection of penitents by God for the promotion of His glory. Their grief kept them humble; and finding them emptied of self, God entered in and made them His instruments in the doing of good.

Oh, the magnanimity of God! Oh, the depths of His mercy! Oh, the sweetness of His solace to those who grieve over their losses in a hopeful spirit! May that solace be ours. May we share it with all who are grief-stricken: "Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we also may be able to comfort those who are in all distress" (2 *Cor.* 1, 2). "Be not wanting in comforting them that weep and walk with them that mourn" (*Eccles.* vii. 38). Such dispositions will prepare us for the life in which mourning shall be no more: "Thus saith the Lord, Let thy voice cease from weeping, and thy eyes from tears, for there is a reward from thy work, saith the Lord" (*Jer.* xxxi. 36). "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away" (*Apoc.* xxi. 4).

XI.

O Lux beatissima,
Reple cordis intima,
Tuorum fidelium.

(Oh, blessed Light, shoot home Thy darts,
And pierce the centre of those hearts
Whose faith aspires to Thee.)

1. FROM the dawn of creation the mission of the Holy Ghost was to give light and life. In the physical order, when "the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, the Spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said: Be light made. And light was made. And God saw the light that it was good" (*Gen.* i. 2-4). In the moral order, that same Spirit in every generation so enlightened the minds of His chosen people and so illumined their pathway as to render their repeated blindness and strayings inexcusable. To this the Pentateuch bears witness. It is stored with luminous directions for the spiritual and temporal welfare of the children of God until the Messiah should come to be a light, not only to Israel but to those who sat in darkness without. The Commandments, the elaborate ceremonial, and the *viva voce* instructions given to Noah, to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Moses were so many rays of light from the Holy Spirit of God. All the signs given and the wonders wrought by God were meant to illumine minds that were dark and to kindle love in hearts that were cold. Surrounded as they were by the "children of men," who dwelt in the darkness of Paganism, the people of Israel needed a sure light to enable them to keep to the true path. Like an advancing fog, the darkness without was ever nearing the tents of the chosen ones. Light was given through the ordering of every detail in their daily lives, so that, unless they loved the darkness more than the light, they could not possibly stray from the pathway of the Lord.

While the people in general were thus favoured, God took their leaders into His secret counsels, and gave them special lights for the worthy performance of their high duties. The specific promises to Noah and to Abraham were at once shafts of light that illumined the way for generation after generation, and anchors

of hope when the surrounding storms threatened to swamp souls with doubt and dismay. "In thee," said God to Abraham, "shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed" (*Gen.* xii. 3). The rainbow was a light which reminded them that, no matter how copious the rains and devastating the floods, the habitable earth should never again be submerged. The trial of Abraham's faith was a prelude to the outburst of light vouchsafed to Simeon, ages after, when he sang his *Nunc Dimittis*: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace: because my eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all the people: a light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of thy people Israel" (*St. Luke* ii. 29-32).

The life of Moses from the time of his call was passed in almost continuous brightness. "And the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire, out of the midst of a bush" (*Exod.* iii. 2). With the people led by Moses God acted not less generously: "The Lord went before them to show the way, by day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire: that he might be the guide of their journey at both times. There never failed the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, before the people" (*Exod.* xiii. 21, 22). Befriended thus in the desert, the people of God were not less favoured in the Egyptian captivity: "And there came horrible darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. No man saw his brother, nor moved himself out of the place where he was; but wherever the children of Israel dwelt, there was light" (*Exod.* xxii. 23). The climax was reached on Mount Sinai: "And the glory of the Lord dwelt upon Sinai . . . and the sight of the glory of the Lord was like a burning fire on the top of the mount, in the eyes of the children of Israel" (*Exod.* xxiv. 16, 17).

In subsequent ages the light of the Holy Ghost rested on the heads of the prophets, illumined their brows when they withstood the enemies of the Most High, purified their tongues when they spoke, and guided their pens when they wrote. It became more and more intense, until at length, in all its effulgence, there stood revealed to the eyes of faithful ones the Desired of all nations: "A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (*St. Luke* ii. 32). "That was the true light which enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world" (*St. John* i. 9). "In him was life, and the life was the light of men: and the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it"

(*St. John* i. 4, 5). "The people that sat in darkness hath seen a great light: and to them that sat in the region of the shadow of death, light is sprung up" (*St. Matt.* iv. 16). What was thus spoken of the Word by the Evangelists was in the course of His life affirmed by Jesus Christ Himself, when He said, "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me walketh not in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (*St. John* viii. 12). "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (*St. John* xiv. 6). By His Divine nature He is the very source of life, for it is eternal in Him as in its essence. He is the source of life for angels and for men. The eternal life of the Word is not different from His supreme wisdom, and wisdom is light. The life and the light are alike in God. "God is light, and in him there is no darkness" (1 *St. John* i. 5).

The saints tell us that this light is the object of the eyes of the soul, and enlightens the souls of all the children of God. As the sun in illuminating numberless objects loses none of its brightness, so the Word of God is the never-failing source of life and light to all made after His image, if they remain firmly established in truth. That light pierces the minds of those whose faith aspires to Him. All are enlivened and enlightened in the way they should walk; nor does the eternal life and light lose any of its fulness or splendour. It is ever active in dispersing rays of justice, love, mercy, truth, wisdom, and of all Divine attributes, for "of his fulness we all have received" (*St. John* i. 16). When received with eagerness and gratitude by the souls of the just, they are reflected back enriched with all the merit gained through the soul's co-operation—merit which will have a corresponding degree of glory in the life to come.

Our Blessed Saviour, in His last discourse to His disciples (*St. John* xiv.-xvi.), returns again and again to the mission of the Holy Spirit, who prepared the way for His coming. He in turn promises the revelation of the Spirit and His indwelling in the Church, and in holy souls, to the end of time. "You believe in God, believe also in me." "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me." "And I shall ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever, the Spirit of Truth . . . you shall know him; because he shall abide with you, and shall be in you." Love is to be the condition of the indwelling of God in the soul: "If any man love me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and will make our abode with him." "The

Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your mind, whatsoever I shall have said to you." "He shall glorify me; because he shall receive of mine, and shall show it to you."

His last discourse ends in a prayer for His disciples. Its sublimity almost rends the veil that screens from us the hidden mysteries of God. As a lightning flash rends the gloomy folds of night and shows the splendours of the landscape, so the majestic words of our Blessed Lord reveal to us His divinity. "Lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said: Father, the hour is come, glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee." He speaks of the power over life given to Him, and of the accomplishment of His work. "And now glorify thou me, O Father, with thyself, with the glory which I had, before the world was, with thee." He prays that His disciples may be kept in the Father's name, that they may be one, as He and the Father are one. "And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given to them: that they may be one as we also are one." How splendidly He verifies what He said of Himself in another place: "I am come to cast fire on the earth: and what will I but that it be kindled?" (*St. Luke* xii. 49).

Oh, how that fire was kindled at Pentecost, when, after the supper-room was filled with the sound as of a mighty wind from Heaven, all gathered there were crowned with "tongues as of parted fire," "and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they began to speak with divers tongues, according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak" (*Acts* ii. 2-4)! We behold in the heavenly glory of this light the consummation of the promises, the seal and confirmation of all that had been done by Jesus, the Light of the World. Let us devoutly contemplate how it was destined to fill the whole world and to pierce the hearts of all true believers till the end of time. Let us so emulate the faith of Mary and all assembled in the Cenacle, as to merit the light we need for our sanctification. O Mary! chosen child of God the Father, Spouse of the Holy Ghost, Mother of Jesus Christ, the God-Man, and our Mother, intercede for us, so that, all darkness being dispelled, the light of the Holy Spirit may beam upon us, penetrate to the very depths of our hearts, and enable us to shine as stars before the throne of God.

2. By our religious vocation we are, like the privileged ones of old, invited to the secret counsels of God. We are part of His

earthly bodyguard. We should, therefore, strive to see all things as He sees them, and resolve to conform our will in all things to His Divine and eternal will. In pondering over the ways of the Holy Spirit with the human race, we should be filled with gratitude for the proofs He has given of His wish so to enlighten the minds of His children as to preserve them from error, so to inflame their hearts as to win their love. This attitude of mind will save us from narrowness and selfishness. That soul is narrow and selfish which is so engrossed in its own sanctification as to be blinded to the needs of others. It acts as if the Holy Ghost existed only for its own personal benefit. Lodged in its own little cell, it forgets that the Holy Spirit longs to fill the whole earth with His glory.

To deepen our gratitude we should often reflect on the historic truths set down in the preceding point regarding the action of the Holy Ghost under the old dispensation. In the New Law He became the very soul of the Church founded by Christ, which was to be a city on the hill-top that could not be hid, for it is filled with, and surrounded by, His radiance. From it there flashes over the world a four-limbed light: Unity, Holiness, Catholicity, Apostolicity, revealing to men of goodwill the Ark of Salvation. Visibly guarding that Ark there is before them the successor of St. Peter, whose prerogative of infallibility far excels the prerogatives of the leaders under the old dispensation. Within its pale we find the Holy Spirit resting on men and women in every epoch, and endowing them with extraordinary light for the edification of their less favoured brethren and for the spread of the Gospel. From these may be singled out the holy Fathers and the Doctors of the Church, the Founders of Religious Orders, the great Theologians; Mystics, too, who were privileged to share the secrets of the Most High, who came forth from their ecstasies with light like that which shone from the brow of Moses when he left the holy mount. Nor have signs and wonders been wanting in confirmation of their internal illumination. The dead have been raised to life, prophetic vision has been vouchsafed, and the gift of tongues has been bestowed.

Pentecost, in the one true Church, is ever repeating itself. How that light changed the heart of St. Paul on his way to Damascus! "And as he went on his journey . . . suddenly a light came from heaven and shined round about him. And falling on the ground he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? . . . And he, trembling, and astonished, said: Lord, what

wilt thou have me to do?" (*Acts* ix. 3-6). His humble co-operation with the light vouchsafed won for him a world-wide mission: "I have set thee to be the light of the Gentiles; that thou mayest be for salvation unto the utmost part of the earth" (*Acts* xiii. 47). How the light of the Holy Spirit illumined the mind of St. Thomas Aquinas and so aided his pen as to win for him the praise of Christ: "Thomas, thou hast written well of me." How it shone on Mount Alverna and pierced the hands, feet, and side of the seraphic St. Francis. How it penetrated the heart of St. Teresa, St. Catherine of Siena, and other favoured mystics called to the Divine espousals. These and kindred wonders should, let us repeat, deepen our gratitude to God for His infinite generosity towards those great saints, and through them towards us, for, through the communion of saints, we all have benefited by their triumphs.

Apart from these instances of the intervention of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church, we have reason also to glorify God because of the triumph of light over darkness in the redemption of those held captive by sin. That triumph is in itself a light to our own pathway. It shows us that, no matter how great the limitations of our fallen nature or how numerous and powerful our spiritual foes, we can, like the saints, find our way to safety, if, shunning the darkness, we look up to God for light and for spiritual life. This would seem to be the mind of the Church in raising saints to the honour of the altar. On the one hand she renders thanks to God for the light vouchsafed to them, and on the other proposes them to us as our models in the search for more abundant light in our difficulties. Day by day the darkness of the world presses closely on us, and we are ever in danger of losing our way; but the danger will be lessened if we consider how the light of the Holy Ghost pierced the hearts of the saints and made them all His own. For we too are called to sanctity.

What a majestic procession passes before one as the ecclesiastical year runs its course! We behold the glorious apostles, the red-robed martyrs, the zealous confessors, the tender virgins; saints of the desert and of the cloister, saints whose crowns were won in remote hamlets, and others who found theirs in busy cities, or even in corrupt courts. There are saints whose names were unknown to any outside their own humble homes, and others whose names are blazoned even on the pages of secular history. Some there are whose intellect was keen as the eagle's glance, and whose

upward ascent was infinitely higher than its flight; others whose illiteracy was a byword, and whose lowly condition a reproach, but who, nevertheless, were consulted by scholars and by Popes to solve difficulties and direct policy. In that long procession we find some who had never sinned grievously, but numberless others who were lifted out of the abyss of dark sin; some on whom the light of the Holy Spirit rested easily because of their naturally docile dispositions, and others on whom it rested only after struggling through the thick darkness of paganism, heresy, or sensuality.

How that spectacle gladdens, enlightens, and encourages the soul! How it fills the heart with gratitude to God, and with resolution to emulate according to one's age and condition! If our humility suggests that we dare not aspire to such an abundance of light as was the portion of the saints, it must not prevent our pleading for the measure that will enable us to reach the perfection of our calling. Let us, then, never tire of repeating:

> O blessed Light, shoot home Thy darts,
> And pierce the centre of those hearts
> Whose faith aspires to Thee.

3. We have been called not only to glorify God for the diffusion of light that has been so abundant in good, but also to bewail the darkness that, in many regions, still exists. It is part of our mission to aid in the dispersion of darkness wherever possible, and to make reparation in cases where combined efforts seem to fail.

In his Epistle to the Ephesians, St. Paul alludes to a phase of darkness that even now envelops many portions of the globe: "For you were heretofore darkness, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light. For the fruit of the light is all goodness, and justice, and truth" (*Eph.* v. 8, 9).

Although we, by the providence of God, have been preserved from the darkness of paganism, our past meditations have reminded us that at times our souls were plunged in gloom. Every sin meant a greater or a lesser withdrawal from heavenly light. That light could not be wilfully excluded without a preference for darkness: "If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he also is in the light, we have fellowship one with another" (1 *St. John* i. 6, 7). Far from being satisfied with bewailing our own past contempt for the light so generously given, our lives should be spent in bewailing the fate of others who, alas! are still lost in darkness, and in labouring for their enlightenment.

How saddening to every lover of God is the darkness of the pagan world, the gloom that envelops the sects, the mists through which worldlings laboriously grope their way! No wonder that the saints wept over that darkness as Jesus wept over Jerusalem. No wonder that, with untiring zeal, they strove to keep alive the fire that Christ came to cast upon the earth. No wonder that they loved penance, study, and prayer. We sometimes marvel at the depth of their sorrow as they contemplated the darkness of the world, forgetting that such sorrow was but a faint reflex of the agony of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemani. Like Him, they bewailed the ingratitude of men in loving the darkness more than the light. They knew that every ray of light was purchased by the outpouring of the Precious Blood. Surely we who, to our sorrow, have experienced the blighting influence of darkness will, now that we have entered into the light, imitate the saints in their holy sorrowing, and, like them, strive ceaselessly to destroy all obstacles to Divine light. What a Christlike work is this! What work could be nobler than to win even a single soul from the outside darkness and set it in the full light of the love of God? What work could be more meritorious? "They that instruct many to justice shall shine as stars for all eternity" (*Dan.* xii. 3). "He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins" (*St. Jas.* v. 20).

Lest generalities should fail to move us we should, occasionally, pass in review the history of those who loved the darkness rather than the light. It is the best antidote to presumption: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 *Cor.* x. 12). Reflection on the fate of Saul, Solomon, Judas, and others, who remained obstinate in evil, will make us wary; while the study of the lives of the great penitents will fill us with hope for the conversion of even the most abandoned, and make us more and more grateful for our own call to repentance: "Giving thanks to God the Father, who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints in light. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness and hath translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (*Col.* i. 12, 13).

4. Discipleship of the Master should mean much more than receptiveness of His gifts. Gifts are given to be used, and the Parable of the Talents was preached to enforce this truth. God

has gifted us with our holy vocation and with all the favours following in its train, with a view to the expansion of His kingdom on earth. We are all expected to be earnest toilers in this sublime task. "Freely have you received, freely give" (*St. Matt.* x. 8). In order that our labour may be fruitful, our pleadings for the light of the Holy Spirit must be ceaseless. It is written: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (*St. Matt.* v. 13), but that our light may shine to spiritual advantage it must proceed from the source provided by God and not from our own misdirected zeal. "He that doth truth cometh to the light, that his works may be made manifest, because they are done in good" (*St. John* iii. 21).

Behold, then, the importance of keeping the soul open to Divine impressions, so that the light of the Holy Spirit may have free access to its innermost recesses. How ungrateful, and in some cases how fatal, it would be not only to refuse the light so generously offered, but to withdraw oneself from its influence! And yet, apart from the commission of actual sin, there are many occasions in which we are guilty of this ingratitude.

In Religious Orders the Rule and Constitutions are the ordinary means of Divine light. They are the result of the working of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the sainted founders. If those means be neglected the Divine intentions are frustrated, and the founders' work is undone; for the realization of God's wishes and the success of the founders' work are dependent on faithful observance. St. Francis of Assisi, in his last testament, explicitly said that his Rule was to be understood and observed *without gloss*, even to the end. Such, doubtless, was, in the main, the intention of all other founders. May not forgetfulness of this point be responsible for the darkness that has sometimes filled the cloister, under cover of which many deplorable abuses entered? Among those abuses may be mentioned disregard of traditions and customs, disrespect for authority, the placing of personal over community interests, the stealthy and unwholesome growth of private judgment, impatience under correction, and an almost entire disregard for the spirit of poverty. Such abuses could not exist if points of rule were read and appreciated. To ignore the Rule means to hate the light. "For every one that doth evil hateth the light, and cometh not to the light that his works may not be reproved" (*St. John* iii. 20).

Darkness, again, overtakes the soul of that Religious who neglects the duties of his state, whether his work be mental or

manual, who is ever in quest of the company of seculars; who is too keenly in touch with all that interests the outside world, while he is out of sympathy with the religious aims of his Order. How can the light of the Holy Ghost find entrance to a soul that is thus full of incompatible elements? "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (*Eph.* v. 11).

Oh, the insult offered Almighty God, when a Religious uses up his intellectual power, exercises his activities, and spends himself in merely worldly pursuits to the exclusion of those which are Divine! Need we be surprised at the astonishment of secular critics? In an age when, in all other spheres, there is unexampled activity, only in comparatively few instances do we find Religious burning with zeal for the glory of God, the welfare of souls, and the honour of their Order. Instead of being the light of the world they intensify its darkness. "What fellowship hath light with darkness?" (2 *Cor.* vi. 14). A sincere examination of conscience may teach us that too much time is devoted to the daily paper, to light literature, and to studies foreign to our state. Or it may be brought home to us that time and energy are wasted in useless visits, prolonged conversations, and fruitless correspondence. If we find any of our habits likely to dim the light, let us with truly religious courage resolve to amend, lest it should be said of us: "The light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil" (*St. John* iii. 19).

If we traced the gradual descent of Religious who ended badly, we should find that their failure was due rather to neglect in seeking needful light than in overt sinful acts. Deprived of light which could have been so easily obtained, the darkness of their souls increased in density, their minds lost their keen perception, and hence the true way was lost. Groping in the dark, they clung to the creatures just at hand, and as those creatures appealed more to the senses than to the spirit, they aided and hastened the downward movement. "These are they who separate themselves, sensual men, having not the spirit" (*St. Jude* 19).

When we hear of spiritual stars falling from heaven we are prone to think that the crisis was preceded by a series of actual sins, and that their former excellence was but hypocrisy. It is not always so. The more charitable and the more likely explanation is that, in the majority of cases, the fall was occasioned by such

attention to worldly affairs, and in such well-meaning attachment to creatures, as made the victims forget that no man is sufficient of himself. They imagined they were ; they consulted not their betters ; they sought not the light of the Holy Spirit, and so walked in darkness. They forgot that they were called to be "children of light and children of the day : not of the night nor of darkness" (1 *Thess.* v. 5). The excitement of work and the glory of success proved poor substitutes for supernatural light, for, when the test of obedience was applied, they could not see that in obedience lay the way to God. And when men in the spiritual order say, "We cannot see," they end by crying, "We cannot, we will not serve !"

These reflections should impress us with the necessity of humbly and persistently imploring light from above in all our undertakings, for if we trust to ourselves we shall move only in the darkness of our fallen nature, and our works will be deprived of the merit of which Divine light would have made them worthy.

Let us rise from this meditation full of gratitude for the light that has reached us through our natural reason ; for the supernatural light that has come through Baptism, which has been strengthened in Confirmation, increased by our religious vocation, and has ever appeared in the counsels of our spiritual directors and the commands of our superiors. Let us avail ourselves of all those precious means in the spirit of faith, deeply convinced that the pathway of duty is the pathway of light. Where a personal light shows not duty, it is not from above, but rather from the prince of darkness. He who leaves the pathway of duty wanders into the outer gloom, and becomes the prey of spiritual brigands ever on the watch for forlorn wanderers. He, on the contrary, who keeps to the pathway of duty finds the light becoming stronger as life goes on. His horror of the external darkness becomes more pronounced. He understands the misery of those who dwell in it. He is fired with zeal to free them, and is untiring in his efforts to lead them forth into the light. God blesses him with wonderful discovery of the needs of others, and light seems to radiate from him—light which attracts poor sinners and makes them long to break their chains. He who walks in the light has a childlike belief in mysteries, a wondrous compassion, a deep-rooted belief in the power of the Holy Ghost to change the greatest criminal into a saint, and thus he never despairs of any man's conversion to God. Still on the earth, he sees God only in a dark manner as through a

glass, but far more clearly now than when he dwelt not far from darkness, or, maybe, was actually living in its depths. He longs for the day when the light will be strong enough to enable him to see God face to face: "In thy light we shall see light" (*Ps.* xxxv. 10). "Grant, we beseech Thee, O Almighty God, that the splendour of Thy brightness may shine forth upon us; and the light of Thy light may, by the illustration of the Holy Ghost, confirm the hearts of those who are regenerated by Thy grace. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, who, with Thee in the unity of the same Holy Spirit, liveth and reigneth, world without end. Amen" (*Prayer in Mass: Vigil of Pentecost*).

XII.

Sine Tuo Numine
Nihil est in homine,
Nihil est innoxium.

(Without Thy Godhead nothing can
Have any price or worth in man,
Nothing can harmless be).

1. DISREGARD of this truth has, in every age, been the cardinal sin of man. In Holy Writ no truth is more insisted on, but, sad to say, none is more generally ignored. Regardless of Divine insistence, blind to the evils consequent on neglect; indifferent to threatenings from above; unmoved by the terrors of God's judgments, one generation has followed another on the road of self-sufficiency. As the world grows older the procession extends in length, the crowd increases, and the task of reaching and moving the consciences of the wayfarers becomes more and more difficult. For union is strength, not only for good but for evil.

Called upon to climb the narrow path that should lead them laden with merit to God, who sent them forth on life's journey, men disport themselves on worldly plains, forgetful of their true goal. Their mission is to sanctify their souls in the constant remembrance that God alone is great, and that all they have and all they hope for are the fruits, not of their own genius, industry, and forethought, but of the bounty of God. "Without Thy Godhead nothing can have any price or worth in man, nothing can harmless be."

God, who from the beginning most generously endowed His children, laid particular stress on their duty towards Himself. Fearing lest man should become arrogant (because of the richness of his store), the Creator commanded him to prostrate himself in adoration, to offer sacrifice, to yield up the firstfruits of the field, and to give tithes of all that he possessed. Until the end of time Adam and his descendants were to remember that their possessions were held in trust, and that a most rigorous account of their stewardship should eventually be exacted.

The history of the human race shows a gradual growth in

man's understanding of and power over the forces of nature, and consequently an ever-increasing indebtedness to God, the giver of every good gift. Had the designs of Omnipotence been heeded, the development of his power, the deepening of his understanding, and the widening of his interests would have thrown man spontaneously into the outstretched arms of his Almighty Father. Gratitude to God for past favours and prudent solicitude for the future naturally suggest such a line of conduct. God, whose gifts have been so lavish in the past, is surely able and willing to benefit man in the future. The favours conferred by earthly benefactors may cease because of the instability of human nature, but who will dare set limits to the beneficent power of God? Who will doubt His word when He says: "Ask and ye shall receive"? The fact is that men do not stop to reason. They simply ignore God, or rule Him out of court. They acknowledge no indebtedness to Him. They act as if they were self-sufficing. And thus it is that no prayer of impetration ascends from their hearts and lips to Him without whom they could not be. "Hear, O ye heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord hath spoken. I have brought up children, and exalted them, but they have despised me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood . . . they have forsaken the Lord, they have blasphemed the Holy One of Israel, they are gone away backwards" (*Isa.* ii. 4).

Man's ingratitude for the benefits conferred in the natural order is equalled only by his blindness in the spiritual order. As the ages passed, God in seasonable time gradually withdrew the veil that had screened His designs from the eyes of primitive man. Types and figures, signs and prophecies, gave way to great realities. With the gradual unfolding of the Divine plan men were expected to exult in the light, to draw nearer to each other in the bonds of unity and brotherly love, and to long more ardently for the heavenly Jerusalem wherein the last vestiges of mystery would disappear. But, alas! many would not awake to the knowledge of the day of their visitation. Proud, self-satisfied (and yet never thoroughly satisfied), mercenary, luxurious, and ungrateful, Heaven's offer of light and unity and love became more and more distasteful to them. What a strange aberration! The clearer man's indebtedness became, the more he exulted in his gifts and powers, as if they were due to himself alone. The more closely

God drew near, the more men shrank into themselves, or drifted into the ranks of schism and heresy.

These deplorable failures were not due to lack of light, for God always insisted on His Divine rights and on man's need of the infinite. Knowing what was in man, He made His prerogatives sufficiently clear from the very beginnings of the human race: "Who hath made man's mouth? or who made the dumb and the deaf; the seeing and the blind? Did not I?" (*Exod.* iv. 11, 12). "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, and let not the strong man glory in his strength, and let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, for I am the Lord that exercise mercy, and judgment, and justice in the earth" (*Jer.* ix. 23, 24). In the Books of Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus men are repeatedly reminded that all they have, and all they can hope for, are from God: "For in his hands are both we, and our words, and all wisdom, and the knowledge and skill of works" (*Wisd.* vii. 18). "As the potter's clay is in his hand, to fashion and order it: all his ways are according to his ordering; so man is in the hand of him that made him, and he will render to him according to his judgment" (*Ecclus.* xxxiii. 13, 14). "Good things and evil, life and death, poverty and riches, are from God" (*Ecclus.* xi. 14).

Man is reminded that this Divine and fatherly interest, far from being casual, is enduring: "Even to your old age, I am the same, and to your grey hairs I will carry you: I have made you and I will bear: I will carry and will save" (*Isa.* xlvi. 4). The certainty of its endurance is intended to move every child of God to cry out with Isaias: "The Lord God is my helper, therefore am I not confounded: therefore have I set my face as a most hard rock, and I know that I shall not be confounded" (*Isa.* l. 7).

Lest it should seem to the self-sufficient that, by banding together, they might successfully ignore or brave Omnipotence, they are reminded that: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it. Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it" (*Ps.* cxxvi. 1). And nations are warned that all their legislation will be unstable and unsafe unless based on Divine counsels: "The Lord bringeth to naught counsels of nations; and he rejecteth the devices of peoples, and casteth away the counsels of princes. But the counsel of the Lord standeth for ever: the thoughts of his heart to all generations" (*Ps.* xxxii. 10, 11). In yet more forcible language the Spirit of

God describes the folly of nations that, in their pride and self-sufficiency, refuse to bow down under the yoke of spiritual authority: "Why have the Gentiles raged, and the people devised strange things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the princes met together, against the Lord, and against his Christ. Let us break their bonds asunder: and let us cast away their yoke from us. He that dwelleth in heaven shall laugh at them, and the Lord shall deride them" (*Ps.* ii. 1-4).

After thus reminding men, as individuals and as nations, of their entire and perpetual dependence on Him, God pronounces woes on all who dare to rebel against Him: "Woe to him that gainsayeth his Maker, a shred of the earthen pots: shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What art thou making? and, Thy work is without hands?" (*Isa.* xlv. 9). "Woe to you, apostate children, saith the Lord, that you would take counsel, and not of me, and would begin a web, and not by my Spirit, that you might add sin upon sin" (*Isa.* xxx. 1).

When fatherly advices, warnings, and threats were discarded, and God was constrained to punish His erring people, He insisted that the scourge was used only to withdraw them from selfishness and pride: "And after he had afflicted and proved thee, at the last he had mercy on thee, lest thou shouldst say in thy heart, My own might, and the strength of my own hand, have achieved all these things for me" (*Deut.* viii. 16, 17).

Moved by these Scriptural proofs, how sincerely should we admit that to God we owe all we have and all we aspire to! How deeply we should bewail our past pride, obstinacy, and self-sufficiency, which so often led us to glory in our works, as if they were due entirely to our own unaided efforts! How fervently, with Moses in his canticle, we should cry: "The Lord is my strength and my praise, and he is become salvation to me: He is my God and I will glorify him: the God of my father and I will exalt him" (*Exod.* xv. 2)! "Who is like to thee among the strong, O Lord? Who is like to thee, glorious in holiness, terrible and praiseworthy, doing wonders?" (*Exod.* xv. 11). "The Lord shall reign for ever and ever!" (*Ibid.* 18).

2. The foregoing sentiments will be deepened if we reflect on our past lives, for they are crowded with testimonies to the fact that without God we are nothing. To Him we owe our being. That we are in the world is due to the free creative act of Omni-

potence. All that we have done has been dependent on the gifts of mind and body with which God had endowed us. "For in him we live, and move, and are" (*Acts* xvii. 28). "To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom all things are, and we unto him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 *Cor.* viii. 6). Granted that our time has been well used, that our physical and mental powers have been exercised to the best advantage, that our influence for good has been widespread and fruitful, and that we have merited the esteem of those whose judgment is sound and impartial—the mere mention of these facts brings before us the vision of One who, all the while, was giving what was needful for the success of our undertakings.

Meritorious, indeed, for everlasting life are all the works that we have done in the state of grace and directed to the Divine glory, but the power to will and to do was from God: "Not that we are sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God" (2 *Cor.* iii. 5). "For the poles of the earth are the Lord's, and upon them he hath set the world. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness, because no man shall prevail by his own strength" (1 *Kings* ii. 8, 9).

If we would understand and reverence the supreme overlordship of God we must study the lives of the saints. Words fail us to describe the depth of their self-abasement in the presence of His majesty, or the sincerity with which they professed their nothingness. Indeed, we are occasionally tempted to imagine that they exaggerated. Alas for our coldness and blindness! If we yielded to those fancies we should only prove that we have not yet seen the necessity of ridding ourselves of self to see God more clearly. This was the secret of the saints. They emptied themselves of self-esteem, and so the Spirit of God found a resting-place in their souls. Their humility made them alive to their entire dependence on God. It was from the fulness of their hearts that they spoke. They extolled God's name, exalted His majesty, proclaimed His power, adored His holiness, trembled in the face of His justice, and melted away at the thought of His tender mercy and love. In the contemplation of infinite greatness they discovered their own nothingness.

We, too, make profession of humility, but it is to be feared that our self-surrender is never complete. We cling to many things as if they were our very own. And even when things are surren-

dered, affections towards them still haunt the mind. Seldom or never do we really empty ourselves of self, and thus we find it difficult to realize the omnipotence of God. That the overpowering might of God may be realized, we must empty ourselves by the sincere acknowledgment that all our gifts are entirely due to His mercy. Only when the soul is thus free from self does God deign to enter in, to favour it far beyond its merits. "He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness, because no man shall prevail by his own strength" (1 *Kings* ii. 8, 9).

The lives of the saints bear witness to the marvellous ways in which their feet were "kept," because of their self-annihilation. God's special providence proved more than compensation for all that they had surrendered. "Be you humbled, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in the time of visitation: casting all your care upon him, for he hath care of you" (1 *St. Pet.* v. 6, 7). Great as were their sacrifices, they knew that God could never be outdone in generosity: "Commit thy way to the Lord, and trust in him, and he will do it. And he will bring forth thy justice as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday" (*Ps.* xxxvi. 5, 6). "Blessed is the man whose help is from thee" (*Ps.* lxxxiii. 6). Humbly acknowledging their nothingness, God bestowed on them powers that bewildered their contemporaries and awoke the admiration of all who lived after them. "But the foolish things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the wise; and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong: and the base things of the world, and the things that are contemptible, hath God chosen, and things that are not, that he might bring to naught things that are: that no flesh should glory in his sight" (1 *Cor.* i. 27-29).

Thousands of saintly lives testify to the truth of these words. Daniel in the lions' den, the three children in the fiery furnace, the mother of the Machabees and her children, bear witness. Martyrs in all the persecutions that have stained the fair face of the earth, from St. Agnes down to St. Joan of Arc, proclaim the truth of the Divine words. Testimony is likewise paid by simple lay brothers, and by devout women, who, in the history of the Church, were consulted by great theologians, and even by Popes, because of the wondrous Divine light vouchsafed to them. In all time the world will be tireless in its admiration of the witness borne by St. Francis of Assisi, who, becoming a fool for Christ's

sake and emptying himself of self, merited the blessings spoken of by St. Paul, together with the very marks of the Crucified. God has ever deigned to favour those who annihilated themselves in His sight, and whose cry was: "Without thy Godhead nothing can have any price or worth in man, nothing can harmless be." "But to whom shall I have respect but to him that is poor and little, and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at my words?" (*Isa.* lxvi. 7). Witness the gift of tongues, the gift of miracles, the gift of prophecy, the gift of discerning the secrets of souls with which He has blessed His favoured ones, who measured themselves, not by the standards of the world, but by a standard infinite and eternal. Looking up and finding that the distance between themselves and the Creator is infinite, they cast themselves down and gladly confessed their nothingness. Finding their souls without self-love, God entered in and made them glorious. From all eternity He had waited for the hour when He should so reward His faithful ones.

3. Many Religious fail because they ignore the fact that the exaltation of God is the only true basis of humility. Short of the daily remembrance and acknowledgment that God alone is truly great, they cannot fathom the depths of their own nothingness, nor can they do justice by their neighbour. Their own works assume a false importance; the works of their neighbour are underrated or despised. The self-important and the disdainful proclaim to all the world that the standard by which they judge is self. No wonder, then, that their best work so often proves useless. "Without thy Godhead, nothing can harmless be." The standard of the humble is God. If we could be really sure of finding a truly humble man, we should be quite safe in saying: "This man's judgment is always correct. This man's advice is safe." Such things cannot be said of the merely clever or the learned; but they can be said of the very, very few humble souls who are seldom found. It should be our constant endeavour to be numbered with the few, by guarding against the insidiousness of self-sufficiency.

The true Religious must exclaim repeatedly: "Without God I am nothing. In the sight of God my sins have made me less than nothing. Oh, that I may know Him! Oh, that I may know myself! Oh, that I may extol His excellencies and glorify His name! Oh, that I may be unknown, so long as God is glorified in my poor, unworthy, hidden life!" Knowing that he is dealing

with the Infinite, he feels that he cannot possibly exaggerate. Nor can he cry halt in his professions of dependence, for each succeeding day renders him more and more a debtor to God. The older he grows, and the more capable he becomes, the greater is his danger if he loses sight of his nothingness. "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you the branches: he that abideth in me and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing" (*St. John* xv. 4-5).

Unutterably sad the fate, and, alas! far too great the number of men who stand condemned for ever because they forgot the truth on which we are insisting. Their superior mental gifts, their great courage, their wide renown and, in many cases, their near approach to sanctity, came to be regarded by them as the result of their own powers. With selfish pride they accepted the incense offered by their contemporaries; and as it rose and curled in volumes over their heads it screened from them the vision of God, to whom they owed all. But it did not shield them from His wrath. He withdrew the graces needed to sustain them in their high position—or those graces lapsed through default of suppliant prayer—and they fell. In too many cases their fall was great indeed. "God hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble" (*St. Luke* i. 52).

Too late did they remember the words of St. Paul: "It is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will" (*Phil.* ii. 13). How feeble, after all, is the impression made by the proud as compared with that made by the humble! Our own experience teaches us this truth; history records it; Holy Scripture confirms it: "God hath abolished the memory of the proud, and hath preserved the memory of them that are humble in mind" (*Ecclus.* x. 21).

Those disasters have lessons for all of us, for, in numberless ways, we are debtors to God. Because of the sublimity of their gifts some are more indebted than others: from him to whom much has been given much will be expected, but no one can claim exemption on the ground of want of sufficient grace. God has given unto all sufficient grace. He to whom little has been given must be as prepared as his richer spiritual neighbour to proclaim that God is the giver. We are thus under the obligation of searching our consciences to discover whether we are paying the debt due to our Supreme Benefactor. Are we deeply convinced

of our indebtedness to Him for all that we have and all that we hope for? Are we fervent and constant in the profession of our nothingness in the sight of His Divine Majesty? Do we at once render thanks for the special favours we receive—light in difficulties; help in dangers; comfort in sorrows? Each soul is led by some special attraction which creates a new indebtedness to the Holy Spirit. Alas, how often the debt remains unpaid! This Retreat should surely mean a special grace. Let us avail ourselves of it to purge our souls of all affection to self-love, so as to be found empty in the sight of God; then may we hope to be filled with heavenly light, and understand that without God there is in us neither worth nor merit. With this knowledge every onward step and every fresh success will find us more earnest in proclaiming our own nothingness, and more sincere in bearing testimony to the greatness of our God.

4. Not only does the acknowledgment of the supreme power of God strengthen our relations with Him, but it defines the true position of our neighbour. When the rights of God are denied our neighbours cannot hope to gain their own. If we find it difficult to bow down before the infinite majesty of God, and to manifest gratitude for His heavenly favours, we shall not find it easier to respect authority that is finite, or to acknowledge gifts that are temporal. In dealing with superiors we shall be prone to susceptibility, to criticism, to disobedience, and obstinacy; in our intercourse with equals and inferiors we shall be captious, arbitrary, domineering, and unjust. Thus we see how much depends on the subject-matter of the present meditation. The acknowledgment of our nothingness in the sight of God will so influence all our conduct as to make us apostles of peace and goodwill.

This was the secret of the extraordinary influence of the saints. In saying: "Peace be to you," or "Peace be to this house," their salutations were hallowed by the humility of their lives. The sense of their nothingness in the sight of God invested them with a magnetic power from which there was no escape. When they spoke, men listened. Where they led, men followed. When they commanded, men obeyed. They regarded all others as better than themselves. With St. Francis they cried: "We are the greatest sinners on earth, for if others had received the graces accorded to us, they would be saints, whereas we are most miserable sinners." Thus impressed, all those trials which to us are so

irksome were to them positive joys. They loved humiliations, delighted in trying commands, and sought what was most repugnant to flesh and blood. Such heroism could have but one foundation—the solid foundation of the consciousness of their own nothingness.

If, then, we discover in ourselves a spirit of pride, disobedience, fault-finding, disrespect, obstinacy, or harshness, let us trace the failing to its real source. That source will be found in a lack of belief in our absolute nothingness. For were we deeply convinced of our nothingness we should clamour less loudly for what we call our "rights"; we should be silent under reproaches; we should listen more meekly to the counsels of others; we should be less critical and more indulgent to the weaknesses of others; we should be more prompt in our obedience, more patient under humiliations, and more generous in our penances.

Far from saying: "I am sufficient for myself": "Say not: I am sufficient for myself" (*Ecclus.* xi. 26), let us be convinced that all our sufficiency comes from God; that our neighbours are likewise His debtors, and that we are debtors both to God and our neighbours. Let us likewise be convinced that the temporary trials in community life will ultimately be for our greater sanctification, if we bear them with a profound consciousness of our own nothingness. "And we glory also in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience trial; and trial hope; and hope confoundeth not: because the charity of God is poured forth in our hearts, by the Holy Ghost, who is given to us" (*Rom.* v. 3-5).

XIII.—LAVA QUOD EST SORDIDUM

(Lord, wash our sinful stains away.)

1. PROFITING by the foregoing reflections, we have, to our grief, discovered how stained we are or have been in the sight of God. In our repentant moods we have often wondered at our easy and repeated falls into sin; but our last meditation should have taught us the explanation. It disclosed to us the fact that our spiritual failures were chiefly due to neglect of God. Even as wayward and selfish children when engrossed with some new toy become forgetful of the presence of parents, so we, in a passing gratification, forgot our heavenly Father. And as thoughtless children forget that their belongings are provided by their parents for careful use, so have we forgotten that the things we use to our destruction were provided by God for our surer progress in virtue. Short of the creative act of God nothing can exist, and nothing that exists "can harmless be" if turned from its legitimate purpose to one that is contrary to the Divine law. Had we daily pondered over the Majesty of God, His Infinite and Eternal Goodness, His Infinite Love, and His inalienable right to our service, we could not have wandered from His side. Such voluntary estrangement should at once have been seen to be a resistance to the light; and sinful though we have been, it is to be hoped that our obstinacy or blindness did not reach as far as grievous sin.

Before going farther we must cast a glance over our past lives, to bewail the transgressions that have stained our souls, and to beseech the God of mercy to wash those stains away. Such a retrospect cannot be strange to us, for it is a part of a Catholic tradition and we have doubtless made many such reviews in the past. As, however, we are told that no one knows whether he is worthy of praise or blame, the inference is that we may have failed to see stains that even now offend the all-seeing eye of God. "Be not without fear about sin forgiven, and add not sin upon sin" (*Ecclus.* v. 3). "Who can understand sins? From my secret ones cleanse me, O Lord: and from those of others spare thy servant. If they shall have no dominion over me, then I shall be without spot: and I shall be cleansed from the greatest sin" (*Ps.* xviii. 13-14). The all-seeing eye of God is infinitely pure and holy, and

thus our oft-repeated cleansings in the Sacrament of Penance may nevertheless have failed to satisfy Him. Ideas of cleanness in the humbler paths of life are far short of the standard required by the well-bred, and so in the spiritual life that which to the creature appears blameless may in the sight of God merit His displeasure. "Though thou wash thyself with nitre, and multiply to thyself the herb borith, thou art stained in thy iniquity, saith the Lord God" (*Jer.* ii. 22). No wonder, then, that the royal Psalmist exclaims: "My eyes have sent forth offerings of water: because they have not kept thy law" (*Ps.* cxviii. 136), and in the fiftieth psalm, after asking God according to the multitude of His tender mercies to blot out his iniquities, the penitent king begs Him to wash him yet more from those iniquities and to cleanse him from his sin, for, he adds: "My sin is always before me." From these humble acknowledgments and pleadings we gather that King David had a very keen appreciation of the infinite holiness of God, and also of the evil power of sin to bury itself deeply into the soul, and thus to render repeated cleansing needful even when not absolutely necessary for salvation.

It is quite possible that this refined sensitiveness for God's honour and this tender solicitude for the purity of the soul are often absent from the spiritual life in modern times. We confess our sins with contrition in the Sacred Tribunal under the conditions necessary for the integrity of the Sacrament of Penance, we accept the penance imposed by the confessor, and then seem to consider that our obligations as sinners are fulfilled. Although the Church does not insist on more, she certainly suggests that much more might well be done by all who aspire to perfection. She points to the great penitents of all times, who even after the assurance of pardon ceased not to weep over their past misdeeds. The great example in the Old Law is the royal Psalmist. In the New Law, in holding up St. Peter and St. Paul, St. Jerome and St. Augustine, St. Mary Magdalen and St. Margaret of Cortona as models of lasting penance, she seems to invite us to imitate them in a constant cry to be cleansed more and more from our stains.

If we consider how sin in one form or other has, from our earliest years, been ingrained in us, we shall find no difficulty in understanding the attitude of the saints. Deep as was their sorrow and swift their reconciliation with God—once their sins were brought home to them—they conceived that nothing short of life-long grief and repeated protestations of unworthiness could prove

the reality of their return to His feet. They doubted not His mercy, but they distrusted their own constancy.

Only when our examination of conscience becomes little more than a matter of routine and our study of the Passion of Christ is superficial, do we pretend that the supplications of the saints were excessive. Real insight requires deep reflection. Such reflection reveals to us that every past sin meant pride, rebellion, and ingratitude that wove themselves into the very texture of the soul. This is equivalent to saying that those passions stain the soul. We may have been repeatedly cleansed in the Sacrament of Penance and even now be clean, but our souls are stained as garments are when plunged into some fast colour. While it is true to say that, after washing, such garments are clean, yet it is equally true to say that they are stained or dyed. Our souls should be spotlessly white through the identification of our will with the holy will of God and the faithful observance of His Divine law, whereas they are dyed or stained by our ruling passion. Our understanding is dimmed, our will is weakened, our spiritual enthusiasm is chilled, and as a result the relics of past sins may well be regarded as stains. Only when this is brought home to us can we unite our voices with those of the great penitents in saying repeatedly: "Lord, wash our sinful stains away."

Well may the Apostle ask: "What fruit, therefore, had you then in those things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of them is death" (*Rom.* vi. 21). What fruit indeed could we gather in when separated from the true vine? How could we gather if we did not associate ourselves with our Heavenly Father, the Master of the Vineyard? What fruit could we hope for in parting company with our Crucified Saviour, who proposed Himself to us as the Way, the Truth, and the Life? What fruits, again, could we expect to gather in shutting out the beams of light and love that the Holy Ghost was ever sending down for our enlightenment and sanctification? Oh, the years that we have misspent! Oh, the energies that we have wasted! Oh, the graces that we have lost in the pursuit of pleasures of which we are now ashamed! Truly the end of them is death. Yes! Our souls have indeed been stained. "They have sinned against him and are none of his children in their filth. They are a wicked and a perverse generation" (*Deut.* xxxii. 5). "Thy own wickedness shall reprove thee, and thy apostasy shall rebuke thee. Know thee and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee, to have left the

Lord thy God, and that my fear is not with thee, saith the Lord the God of hosts" (*Jer.* ii. 19).

Too seldom do we pause to consider how evil and how bitter it was to have left the Lord our God. *It was an evil thing*, inasmuch as it was a deliberate act of disobedience, pride, and ingratitude. God Himself speaks in the most touching way of the ingratitude bound up with sin. "What is there that I ought to do more to my vineyard that I have not done to it? Was it that I looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it hath brought forth wild grapes?" (*Isa.* v. 4). How spiritually fruitful all of us might be had we co-operated with the Master of the Vineyard from the days of childhood even until now! Oh, that our lives had been spent in the cultivation of virtues and in the exercise of works meritorious of everlasting life! Oh, that we could recall the years that have been wasted and win back the opportunities that have been lost! *It was a bitter thing*, because of its terrible consequences. We lost the friendship of the best of fathers and came under the spell of His infernal foe. It was a bitter thing to find ourselves despoiled of our stored-up merits—merits won through the Precious Blood—and made incapable of meriting more while in a state of sin. It was a bitter thing to plunge a sword of sorrow into Mary's heart and to withdraw ourselves from her maternal arms. Bitter, too, it was to prove deaf to our angel's warnings, indifferent to the counsels of our spiritual guides, blind to the good example of our neighbours. Bitter beyond description were the hours in which we hung suspended over the pit of Hell, saved from damnation only through the mercy of God. Who can describe the bitterness of remorse as it preyed like a worm on the soul by day and by night; the fear that seized us when confronted with the pure and the good; or the deep consciousness of spiritual poverty that blighted all the joy arising from worldly success? "But they that commit sin and iniquity are enemies to their own soul" (*Tob.* xii. 10).

Where up to the present have been our feelings of shame, our sense of sorrow, our resolutions never more to sin? Have we not become regardless of shame; have we not silenced our sentiments of sorrow and made abortive our cold resolutions? What else can be gathered from our unhappy tendency to add sin to sin, regardless of the warnings of God and the chidings of an outraged conscience? Now that God in His mercy speaks to us once more, let us hearken to His voice: "To-day if you shall hear his voice

harden not your hearts" (*Ps.* xciv. 8). Now that conscience is awakened to a true view of sin, and that memory shows us our doings in the past, let us cry, "I will recount to thee all my years in the bitterness of my soul" (*Isa.* xxxviii. 15). "Now, therefore, saith the Lord, be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. And rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God: for He is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil" (*Joel* ii. 12, 13).

For our consolation in this hour of sorrow and repentance let us remember that "the sorrow that is according to God worketh penance, steadfast unto salvation" (2 *Cor.* vii. 10), and that while "the way of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, he that followeth justice is beloved by him" (*Prov.* xv. 9). It is because we wish to follow justice for evermore that we long to have the assurance that all our sinful stains are washed away.

2. Thus far we have had chiefly in mind those stains that eat into the very vitals of the soul and destroy its life, but there are others which, though leaving that life intact, besmirch it and render it displeasing to God. We make light of those stains because they are venial, ignoring the fact that we thus show a deplorable lack of filial love. We, moreover, manifest a poor appreciation of the holiness of God, absence of gratitude for the work of redemption, ignorance of the value of grace, practical disregard of the doctrine of Purgatory, and lack of sympathy for the souls that suffer there. From this it can be seen that our attitude towards venial sin reveals the condition of our spiritual life. If we stand self-convicted of apathy in combating venial sin, our spirituality is at a low ebb: we live not according to the Spirit, for if we did we should have a lively horror of all that hinders the Divine work in the soul.

Now venial sins in many ways do hinder those operations, for they are at once the causes and the results of tepidity. That tepidity is an object of displeasure to Almighty God is evident from the manner in which He reprobates it, for, in the Apocalypse (iii. 16), He declares that the soul which is neither cold nor hot, but tepid, is fit only to be vomited out of His mouth. Such a soul is useless in working for His glory and in combating His enemies. Lack of zeal in His service means lack of co-operation with the graces that are constantly being offered, and consequently the soul

is brought to a standstill on the Great King's highway. To neglect even the slightest grace is to play into the hands of the enemy, for he who neglects small things shall fall by little and by little. It is a cowardly yielding up of an outpost provided by Almighty God to safeguard the citadel of the soul, and is, therefore, the act of a traitor, for he who is unfaithful on minor occasions cannot be heroic when grave dangers threaten. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in that which is greater: and he that is unjust in that which is little is unjust also in that which is greater" (*St. Luke* xvi. 10). If sorrow for sin were really abiding, tepidity would be an impossibility; thus if we discover any traces of it, we should tax ourselves with ingratitude, and spare no pains in reaching a state of religious fervour.

We should reflect that venial sins pave the way to more grievous sins because of the enfeeblement of the powers of the soul. Spiritual vision becomes so dim that it loses the power to distinguish greater evils from lesser; will power grows so enfeebled that it fails in great emergencies; faith so loses its activity that it has no longer the driving power needful to stir it up to prayer, penance, and good works; and thus the soul loses spiritual tone and deprives itself of untold spiritual merit. Moreover, those in our immediate surroundings become infected with our lassitude, and the souls in Purgatory languish because of the loss of the aids that they vainly look for.

It is no exaggeration to say that habitual venial sin and tepidity are strangely infectious. It is especially so in the cloister, where the daily prayers and works of the Religious are so interdependent: hence the necessity incumbent on us of leaving our Retreat fully bent on fighting these insidious foes. Even one tepid Religious can do incalculable harm, for tepidity presupposes such original fervour as satisfied the requirements of the Institute, and is therefore a departure from the recognized standards and a notably bad example to others. Short of an Order having become sadly relaxed, we must assume that those who showed signs of tepidity in the early years of vocation were instantly dismissed, for tepidity in the early years of one's religious life must be regarded as an outrage. If, then, later on in life, it unmistakably shows itself, what a spectacle it offers to the young, and what a snare is prepared for all! The young—childlike, docile, and simple—are as clay in the potter's hand, and fear to show fervour lest they should seem to reproach one who has so long worn the religious

habit; the more mature fear to utter reproaches lest they should seem pharisaical; those interiorly called to exceptional fervour stifle their aspirations and gradually relax their spirit of observance (through fear of appearing singular), and thus the only really singular member of the community—the tepid Religious—becomes supreme. Though not respected, he is feared; for no one can be more dogmatic than the Religious who perpetually belittles rules and regulations. Herein lies danger, not only for individuals, but for the community and the Order at large. So grave is the danger that it justifies an appeal to the words of our Blessed Lord: "But he that shall scandalize one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone should be hanged about his neck, and that he should be drowned in the depth of the sea" (*St. Matt.* xviii. 6). Let the tepid, who glory in what they call their freedom from conventionality, remember in the words of St. Paul that their glorying is not warrantable: "Know you not that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump? Purge out the old leaven that you may be a new paste, as you are unleavened. For Christ, our pasch, is sacrificed. Therefore let us feast, not with the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 *Cor.* v. 6-8).

In this text we find a sure remedy for tepidity—*i.e.*, the remembrance that Christ, our Pasch, was sacrificed. There is no other road to fervour. Just as our graver sins are traceable to forgetfulness of the supremacy of God, so our lighter ones and our tepidity are due to forgetfulness of the price paid for the smallest grace. Remembering the Passion and Death of Christ, reflecting on His zeal, we shall ever delight to spend ourselves in His service, and thus tepidity will be unknown to us. While we ponder daily over His Sacred Wounds, our gratitude will be so deep as to make every venial sin hateful to us.

3. If our progress in the spiritual life has happily made actual sin a mere memory, and if our daily failings are only sins of surprise, we should nevertheless run risks if we made this freedom from deliberate sin a pretext for lessening our compunction. We have no Divine sanction for ceasing to mourn over sin. Although unconscious of grievous stains in the present, we must never forget those of the past. God in His mercy has forgiven them, but we must never forget them. Our remembrance, however, must be seasoned with hope through Jesus Christ our Lord. Diffidence and

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servile fear must be banished, but humility, watchfulness, prayer, gratitude, and mortification must be strenuously cultivated. Tears of sorrow over past sins irrigate the soul and promote the growth of humility, faith, hope, and charity. They deepen the well of compassion and make us long for the conversion of others, that they may become sharers in our joy as they have been participators in our sorrow.

This was the secret of the sanctity of the great penitents. Their sorrowing, far from being maudlin, hysterical, or fitful, was dignified, deep, and lasting, thus revealing the greatness of their souls. Transient, hysterical sorrow betrays shallowness of spirit. Deep, calm, silent, enduring sorrow shows that the penitent has gauged the immensity of God as compared with his own nothingness; that he has compared eternity with time, and has balanced Heaven with Hell. It points to a comparison of virtue with vice, and reveals to us a soul that now groans in spirit, either in Gethsemani or on Calvary, in the hope of rejoicing eventually on Thabor. St. Peter was never nobler than when he wept. But a moment before a mere maidservant cowed him; weeping, he conquered all the powers of Hell. King David, but for his tears, would have no honoured place in God's own Book, nor place in the minds and hearts of men. St. Francis of Assisi, in making himself almost blind through weeping, found scales falling from his eyes that enabled him to see the splendour of God.

The true penitent recalls to mind that in his sinful days he opposed God's Immensity with all the passion of his erring soul, and that for days and, may be, for years he repeated his fruitless opposition. When at length his wearied arm fell limp by his side, he felt that with the other he should beat his breast with equal force in sorrow. He begged for force in his sorrowing, and God did not deny it to him, nor would he wish it ever to be diminished. So St. Jerome must have reasoned in the Grotto of Bethlehem as he beat his naked breast with a stone; and so, too, must have reasoned St. Ignatius in the cave at Manresa. All the saintly penitents wept as they pleaded that God would wash away their sinful stains. They felt that human life was far too short to expiate the past; they knew that the heights of bliss to which they aspired were infinitely out of proportion to their trivial penances. May God grant us the grace to imitate them!

Abiding sorrow for sin moderates the passions and purifies the soul. The very mention of it suggests breadth of view in dealing

with the ordinary defects of others, and mercy towards those who have not yet risen from the depths of sin: for sorrow reminds man of days when he too was in the toils, and found it difficult to escape. It endows the soul with peculiar tenderness, and so promotes the growth of virtue, just as the gentle dew promotes the growth of plants. Like a balmy south wind it brings with it restfulness and repose, ever so different from the biting, irritating, sterile north or east wind, typical of the cold mechanical soul, whose only influence on others is to benumb and paralyze. This soul was pictured by our Blessed Lord in the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican: "O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men" (*St. Luke* xviii. 11). The words freeze us! But we melt away when the soft, low, sorrowing tones of the publican fall on our ear: "O God, be merciful to me a sinner," synonymous with the words of our text: "Lord, wash our sinful stains away!"

Let us resolve to leave our Retreat full of this grand spirit of compunction, so as to merit the eulogy of our Blessed Lord: "This man went down to his house justified rather than the other." Let us resolve to sow in sorrow that we may reap in joy. O Mary, Mother of Sorrows, help us so to share in the sorrows of thy Divine Son and in thine own, that we may merit to rejoice in the everlasting Bliss which those sorrows have won. Amen.

XIV.—RIGA QUOD EST ARIDUM

(Refresh from heaven our barren clay.)

1. EXCEPT for the Divine bounty, we are unable to perform any good work meritorious of everlasting life. "No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him" (*St. John* vi. 44). The Heavenly Father draws His child towards Him by the grace which is needed for the beginning of faith; and our good works, unless bedewed with grace, are of value only in the natural order. Those works may nourish our self-complacency, may win the praise of others, may pave the way to fortune or win for us distinction, but when these are gained, the word "Finis" is written to our rewards: "But the sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God: for it is foolishness to him and he cannot understand" (1 *Cor.* ii. 14). "It is God who worketh in you both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will" (*Phil.* ii. 13).

How distressing it is to reflect that millions live and die uninfluenced by these truths, ignoring the fact that they have been created for a supernatural end, contenting themselves with the natural level on which they are placed. Their reason is not exercised as God intends it to be, for although He puts it in their power to have at least a glimmer of the life beyond the tomb, they stop short at the limits of the universe. They seem afraid to look farther afield or to look up, lest they should be forced to submit to godly discipline and to loosen their hold on worldly things. "In times past he suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself without testimony, doing good from Heaven. Giving rains and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness" (*Acts* xiv. 15-16).

Notwithstanding this testimony, the pagan world even now stretches out as a vast desert wrapped in the gloom of ignorance of God's ways. Seasons have come and gone, dynasties have risen and fallen, missionaries have watered the ground with their blood, yet the pall of darkness is unlifted, and the pagan heart seems hard as stony ground. How we should pray, toil, and do penance, that the gloom may be dissipated by rays of heavenly light, and the refreshing dew of grace may be showered down for the regeneration of the millions who dwell in the valley of the shadow of death! What a triumph it would be for the Precious

Blood if those dense populations were enlightened in mind and softened in heart! How changed for the better would be the face of the world if those spiritual slaves were freed from their fetters and led into the sweet liberty of the children of God, bearing the gentle yoke of Christ! *Riga quod est aridum* should be the earnest cry of the Religious as his eye sees in spirit the vast expanses scarcely touched as yet by the feet of those who carry the good tidings of the Gospel. *Riga quod est aridum.* The words would purge him of littleness, selfishness, and cowardice, and remind him that he is called to the cloister, not only for the search after personal sanctification, but for hearty co-operation with the Universal Church in the conversion of the whole world. *Riga quod est aridum.* Even as the true patriot, the inheritor of the civilization of ages, sorrows over the slavery and ignorance of the races still fettered with tyrannical chains, and in the name of freedom longs to aid in their emancipation, so the true Religious burns with zeal for the enlightenment and deliverance of the spiritually benighted. If debarred from giving his life, he offers voluntary penance; if it is not in his power to give alms, he prays that those who have the means may be generous; if he cannot actively influence others as Peter the Hermit and St. Bernard influenced the Crusaders, he in his solitude beseeches the Holy Spirit to raise up labourers for the distant vineyards, so that the barren soil may be irrigated and a generous vintage gathered in. The words of Our Lord urge him to act his part in heroic fashion as far as obedience permits: "And seeing the multitudes, he had compassion on them, because they were distressed and lying like sheep that have no shepherd. Then he saith to his disciples, The harvest indeed is great, but the labourers are few. *Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he send forth labourers into his harvest*" (*St. Matt.* ix. 36-38).

2. If the spiritual darkness of pagan lands occasions grief, what should be our feelings in contemplating the sad plight of civilized countries, wherein thousands reject the light? Familiarity with Gospel teaching warns them of their impotence, without the grace of God, to perform works meritorious of everlasting life. They likewise know more or less clearly that without the special help of God they cannot persevere in His favour in the face of grave and persistent temptation; this special help is, however, the one they never seek. They eagerly accept all the good things that con-

tribute to their worldly welfare, but for the good things of the Spirit they have no relish. "For they that are according to the flesh mind the things that are of the flesh, but they that are according to the spirit mind the things that are of the spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death, but the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace. Because the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God. . . . And they who are in the flesh cannot please God" (*Rom.* viii. 5-8). The very luxuriance of their natural gifts hides from them the paradise of the supernatural that is within easy reach. They see not the forest because of the trees. Did they humble themselves so that the scales fell from their eyes, they would see that their fruitfulness according to nature is utter barrenness compared with the fertility of grace. God wishes them to see in this fashion: "'The just man liveth by faith" (*Rom.* i. 17). He wishes them to reason from the things they see to the things that are hidden from their eyes; for if He causes the sun to shine on the bad as well as on the good, and the rain to fertilize the fields of the unjust as well as those of the just, He means all men to understand that He has better things in store for those who strive to fulfil all justice. "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, his eternal power also and divinity, so that they are inexcusable. Because that, when they knew God, they have not glorified him as God, or given thanks, but became vain in their thoughts and their foolish heart was darkened. For, professing themselves to be wise they became fools" (*Rom.* i. 20-22).

The earth has ever been so densely crowded with such purblind creatures that St. John was justified in making them representative of the "world"—the world which is in opposition to the Spirit of God: "Brethren, love not the world, nor the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof, but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 *St. John* ii. 15-17). From the Christian standpoint it is difficult to understand how a reasoning being can revel in, and be perfectly contented with, the comforts and pleasures which, sooner or later, must be given up, and whose enjoyment (while they last) is beset with many anxieties; but the existence of this state is so evident as to save the observer from the

charge of rash judgment. There is something positively unholy in the lives of men who are deaf to the whisperings that must besiege them : "Is not there a higher life? Do not my greater gifts demand a greater good? For my life, as *I* live it, is no better than that of irrational creatures. They live only for the earth, so do I; they live only for time, so do I—but with this difference, that they as a rule have a much more pleasant existence, for they enjoy every sense to the limits of its capacity, whereas I am often thwarted in my desires. If, then, the beasts of the field are in some respects even more privileged than I, would not creation be strangely out of joint, if somehow it is not in my power to have every righteous wish gratified? Is it not, therefore, my duty to set out in search of that place, and to bring my life into line with its requirements?" Such reasoning would eventually lead men to exclaim with St. Augustine : "I have been created for Thee, O my God, and never shall I rest until I find my repose in Thee." They would be convinced of their native barrenness without the aid of God's grace, and their souls would hunger for that heavenly dew which alone can render human lives fruitful in merit and—hereafter—in glory.

It is appalling to contemplate the widespread moral barrenness that exists, and the terrible waste of time and energy involved, while from the merely material point of view luxuriant growth is found everywhere. Buried in arctic and antarctic snows, there are self-sacrificing pioneers eager to plant the national flag a degree farther north or south ; lost in the jungle, medical students are wresting secrets from herbs for the corporal benefit of their fellow-men ; in the studio and in the laboratory, in the factory and in the workshop, in parliament and on platforms men vie with one another in labouring for the betterment of the race, with a measure of success that intoxicates them and blinds them to the fact that they are neglecting the better things. Seeking not the grace of God and ridiculing the idea of working with a supernatural motive, how barren, alas! are their labours for everlasting life, how short-lived their rewards. What will it matter if their fame outlives them by a thousand years, if when they reach the shores of eternity they find nothing stored up there for their felicity? "Cast thy bread upon the running waters, for after a long time thou shalt find it again" (*Eccles.* xi. 1). Unless bedewed with grace, the sowing of men can produce only stunted plants. Were man created only for the world, those products might satisfy, but

created as he is for God and His kingdom, his soul cannot be satisfied with less. The seed of this glorious immortality, this supernatural harvest, this priceless treasure, is likewise the grace showered down from Heaven, which, fructifying, changes the barren soul into a land flowing with milk and honey.

3. In these utilitarian days a Religious might easily be lured into the ways of worldlings. Like them, he might rest satisfied with the work which comes to hand and the material rewards that are offered him. Praised and sought after, he might flatter himself that all is well. Is it not to be feared that, as the fishermen of Galilee laboured all the night and caught nothing, so a reputed man of God may labour all his life without adding to his store of merit? When at the bidding of Christ the fishermen tried again, the haul of fish was so great that the net broke. Even so, it is only through sowing and reaping in God's name and with the aid of His grace that the barren clay of our fallen nature can be fertilized and made productive of rich and lasting fruits, for unto this we have been called. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you and have appointed you, that you should go and should bring forth fruit, and your fruit should remain; that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name he may give it you" (*St. John* xv. 16). How woeful, then, the condition of Religious who live and toil as mere educationists, preachers, writers, or nurses, for their outlook on life, their ambitions, their manners, and their speech are in unholy harmony with the "world" of which St. John speaks. They fear to be thought narrow, strait-laced, retrograde, or antiquated, and their fears are founded not on a message from on high, not on the example of the saints nor on the authority of the Church, but on the insolent criticism of some agnostic writer, or on the insidious remark of a lecturer on modern science. If priests, they are hail-fellow-well-met with sleek aldermen, wily politicians, and self-satisfied authors, who regard them as "so very human," "so broad-minded," "so free from bigotry and prejudice"; if religious women, they are patronized and talked about by the thoughtless mob, but regarded as whited sepulchres by the discerning members of the One True Fold. Let no Religious be deceived! If he sows merely on natural lines: studying, toiling, with a view to please the eyes of men rather than to grow in virtue and to please Almighty God, he will reap but a whirlwind of misery, for worldly success, if it

prove not a decoy to lead him from the sanctuary or the cloister, will make his life obstinately barren of merit. "Be not deceived, God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap" (*Gal.* vi. 7, 8). His brethren will find no evidence of spiritual growth to cheer them and to excite their emulation, for his worldly bearing will have a depressing or irritating effect on the would-be generous, and will lend a certain sanction to the vagaries of the lax. If, unfortunately, the worldly-minded Religious is a superior, there are no limits to the harm that may be done in and out of the cloister; the land reclaimed by generations of zealous predecessors may revert to its former barrenness. "Because thou sayest, I am rich, and made wealthy, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (*Apoc.* iii. 17).

Let us not be misunderstood. We are far from saying that actions done without the influx of grace are evil, for that doctrine was branded as heretical by the Council of Trent, *Sess.* vi., Can. 7; but if souls called to the religious state persistently act on the low level of the natural law, there is an implicit contempt of the Divine favours so generously offered by God, and therefore an absence of living faith. They are not bearing the fruit that their vocation requires and that God looks for. They are in effect burying their supernatural talents; and, as the man who buried his talent was cast out into the exterior darkness, what better fate can await him who trifles with the generosity of the Supreme Benefactor? "And seeing a certain fig tree by the wayside, he came to it, and found nothing on it but leaves only, and he said to it: May no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And immediately the fig tree withered away" (*St. Matt.* xxi. 19). On this point all the great saints waxed eloquent. They were far from denouncing culture, or progress, or innocent pleasures; but they did unite in denouncing a world which insisted that it had a sufficiency in itself, and they did warn men of their folly in thinking that they could dispense with help from above. They bewailed the dreariness of a barren soul as Jeremiah bewailed the desolation of Jerusalem; and we also, if we would save ourselves from the blighting, sterilizing influence of the world, must bemoan the barrenness of those who are not led by the Spirit of the Lord, and who spurn the fertilizing dews of grace that God would fain shower down upon them. In the regions of science, literature and art, government and education, let us rid ourselves of maudlin

sentimentality, and have the courage to call things by their proper names. No matter how useful a labour may be, or how classical a book, or how æsthetic a work of art, or how progressive a system of education, if it is not in harmony with some supernatural principle it is purely and simply *mammon*. "No man can serve two masters. For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will sustain the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (*St. Matt.* vi. 24).

4. All these considerations show the need of discovering how we stand with regard to the use or abuse of the grace of God. We must be deeply convinced that in the spiritual life it is grace that matters most: "Without me you can do nothing" (*St. John* xv. 5); "So you also, when you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which we ought to do" (*St. Luke* xvii. 10); "If anyone abide not in me he shall be cast forth as a branch, and shall wither, and they shall gather him up, and cast him into the fire, and he burneth" (*St. John* xv. 6). Grace, therefore, is our life, our treasure, our all! And what is life here is meant by Almighty God to be glory hereafter: "For the wages of sin is death. But the grace of God life everlasting, in Jesus Christ our Lord" (*Rom.* vi. 23). *In Jesus Christ our Lord.* This is the great thing to be remembered, for it gives the reason of the value and importance of grace. To say that it is grace that matters most is true, but it is saying too little: grace matters most because of the infinite price paid for it: "For you are bought with a great price" (1 *Cor.* vi. 20). "But you are a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people" (1 *St. Pet.* ii. 9). "Because thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God in thy blood" (*Apoc.* v. 9). Let us then, like the saints, be deeply impressed with the truth that every single grace means an outpouring of the Precious Blood. In the infancy of the Church, when dogmatic pronouncements were few; in the deserts, where manuscripts were scanty and learned expositors almost unknown; in remote country districts where religion was often under a ban; before theological systems were elaborated and schools were set up: there was one thing above all grafted on the souls of our predecessors in the Faith that led efficaciously unto sanctification, and that was a knowledge of the value of grace because of its cost. How deep the reverence and how keen the

thirst of the Catholics of old for grace! How strenuous their endeavours to guard it and to have it intensified in their souls! And how criminal we should be if we allowed our greater knowledge of dogma and systems to push out the thought of the Redeemer! If we allowed this to happen, how small in the sight of Heaven we should be as compared with the saintly illiterates who dived down into the heart of the matter, and found the source of grace to be that which, in practice, may be hidden from us—viz., the fountain of the Precious Blood.

Only by reflecting on these lines can we hope to live the life of grace. Only thus can we be numbered with the saints, for all the saints meet on Calvary as on common ground. Their bond of union is the study of Christ and Him crucified. They recognize that every grace is tinged with His Precious Blood. The absence of this spirit accounts for our aridity. We are barren because we do not irrigate our souls by tears shed over the passion of Christ, because we do not plough and harrow our hearts by penance and mortification. In crying *Riga quod est aridum* we shall no longer plead in vain if we show a little more generosity in uniting our trials with those of the Master, and in appreciating more than in the past the precious gift of grace, which cost Him the last drop of His Precious Blood.

XV.—SANA QUOD EST SAUCIUM.

(Our wounds and bruises heal.)

1. IN this meditation we raise our hearts to the Holy Spirit as the Divine Physician, for He alone can remedy the evils which afflict us. Crippled in our efforts after perfection, wounded and bruised in our daily combats with the devil, the world, and the flesh, we, like the poor sufferers mentioned in the Gospel, implore His aid. He knows that of ourselves we have no claim on Him; but in His mercy He has provided us with credentials—for He has endowed us with faith; and relying on the assurance of our Blessed Saviour that the Paraclete, whom He should send, would comfort us, we are filled with hope.

Although our wounds and bruises are mainly the result of our folly, the Divine Physician is less concerned with their origin than with the spirit in which we seek to have them cured. He is satisfied, if we plead with faith, with confidence, and with a contrite heart. "Do you believe that I can do this unto you?" asked Jesus of the blind men who cried out, "Have mercy on us, O Son of David," and the short but eloquent answer came, "Yea, Lord." "Then he touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it done unto you. And their eyes were opened" (*St. Matt.* ix. 27-30). With like faith and confidence we in this Retreat await healing at the hands of the Divine Physician.

We must not let the deep consciousness of our guilt weaken our confidence, for no one knows better than He the clay of which we are formed. Without condoning the sinful excesses of our life, He will nevertheless pity our frailty; without being blind to our slavish co-operation in bringing evil upon ourselves, He will compassionate the deplorable results and apply balm to our wounds. He witnessed the impulsiveness, the curiosity, and the obstinacy of our childhood, the recklessness and disobedience of our youth, the pride, vanity, and ambition of our maturer years; but He also saw our shame, our sorrow, our tears, and our remorse; and to-day we feel that His pity for us is infinitely greater than we can conceive. Out of that pity will flow such healing power as will remedy all our ills.

In our past lives we have had many striking proofs of His tender solicitude for our spiritual health. What were the upbraidings of conscience but so many gentle admonitions on the part of the

Heavenly Physician for our greater good? And when, through failing to heed them, we relapsed again and again, did not He, with more than maternal solicitude, raise us up, until through very shame we were led to see where duty lay? Hovering over the sacred tribunal of penance—God's mercy seat in the Church—wherein sat the deputed physician of souls, there was the Great Physician Himself, the Holy Spirit of God, inspiring, encouraging, advising, warning, threatening, but at the same time healing our bruises and binding up our wounds.

Oh, the miracles that have been wrought in us from the age of reason even until now! The wonders that have happened in the great shrines of healing throughout Christendom are in the sight of Heaven insignificant, compared with the spiritual miracles wrought in us in the sacred tribunal of penance. We have entered it, covered with sores and wounds, and have emerged cleansed and whole. Spiritually dead, we have been carried there through the good offices of our Blessed Mother, our sainted patrons, and our angel guardians, and have been raised to life by the Divine Physician. We have shyly visited it, poor and naked, and have come forth enriched with sanctifying and sacramental grace, with all our lost merit restored, and with power to merit anew vouchsafed to us. True, we had to submit to conditions trying to flesh and blood—conditions that covered us with confusion, and wrenched from us persons and things which seemed dearer than life itself; but in acknowledging God's justice in exacting those sacrifices, we ended by wondering at His infinite leniency; for what is the whole world in comparison with the least of the gifts of God? Like all true penitents we recognized that justice must be done, though the heavens should fall, and that the breaking of Divine laws made solely for our own protection and for the preservation or society at large must be atoned for by humble confession, efficacious contrition, and salutary penance.

O thrice blessed tribunal in which God's justice is vindicated, in which the penitent again finds his soul that was lost, and in which our injured neighbour regains his own! How deplorable would be the fate of man without its existence: Judas-like, he would be a prey to despair; Cain-like, he would be a wanderer over the earth—degraded, abandoned, a slave less to the devil than to his own base passions and servile fears, he would find earth a very hell. Happily, with this sacred tribunal looming up, beholding in it the portals of his father's house, and remembering the millions

of penitent souls who in all the ages of Christianity have passed through, he, too, summons up courage and cries: "I will arise and will go to my father, and shall say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee!" O blessed words—worthy response to the invitation of the Divine Physician: "Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (*St. Matt.* xi. 28).

2. It would be untrue to say that all the evil we commit is due to culpable ignorance or to malice, for many of our faults are partly the result of circumstances over which we have not perfect control. In meditating on the origin, growth, and development of the passions, we saw that many of our shortcomings are attributable less to malice than to predispositions to evil which those responsible for our early education did not check. Thus, although our will is free, and our efforts to restrain our passions may be earnest, the old Adam within us is ever seeking his own—and alas! with a success that we daily regret. We pray, we do violence to ourselves, we fly from one occasion of sin and wrestle with another, only to find that although we are still on the way to God, through holding fast to the Faith and by abhorring mortal sin, our soul is nevertheless wounded and bruised, and much in need of Divine healing.

Truly a man's enemies are those of his own household. St. Paul reminds us that, although the light of the Holy Ghost may shine in our hearts, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency may be of the power of God and not of us. In all things we suffer tribulation, but are not distressed: we are straitened, but are not destitute: we suffer persecution, but are not forsaken: we are cast down, but we perish not" (2 *Cor.* iv. 7-9). Thus St. Paul describes the wounds and bruises incidental to the Christian struggle, but he is far from exhausting them; for who can number the trials bound up with heredity or environment? Contingent and dependent beings that we are, we are very much at the mercy of those around us. In essential things we may not waver: our faith may be firm, no matter how irreligious our surroundings, our hope may be constant in the face of persistent opposition, our moral rectitude may be irreproachable, notwithstanding the violence of temptation; but just as a barque which, with its treasure, safely reaches port bears outward marks of buffetings and inward signs of strain, so we, in body and soul, bear

tokens of the protracted struggle, although habitual grace may be intact. "In many things we all offend" (*St. Jas.* iv. 2). "For a just man shall fall seven times and shall rise again" (*Prov.* xxxiv. 16). It is good for us to humble ourselves by acknowledging that the results of our strivings fall short of the expectations of Almighty God—nay, that they are far from reaching the standard set up by ourselves. "So you also, when you shall have done all these things that are commanded you, say: We are unprofitable servants" (*St. Luke* xvii. 10). This confession is so much opposed to our innate pride, that to make it is to feel wounded and bruised. Humiliating, too, is the inability to do all that we should wish, as age creeps on with its mental and physical limitations. These trials are to be borne patiently as coming from the hand of God, who, in due measure and season, will supply remedies suitable to our needs.

3. Although we Religious are not of the world, we nevertheless almost unconsciously suffer from contact with it. The ship that so proudly sets out from port, and seems disdainful of opposing waves, eventually finds its speed lessened by the growth of seaweed under the water-mark; so are we impeded by the growth of imperfections caused by our contact with the outside world. Human respect, timidity, "dissipation," frivolous reading, loss of reverence for authority, disregard of silence, neglect of study, and disrespect for traditions and customs, are some of the imperfections that impede our spiritual progress and make our religious lives more burdensome than God intended them to be. The Lord loves a cheerful giver; and ready, cheerful observance is the royal road to happiness in the cloister, as it is the speediest and surest road to Heaven. Fidelity to the particular examen would reveal the existence of the imperfections we speak of, but it is part of the worldly spirit to belittle that salutary exercise; even when it is practised the results are not always satisfactory, for to discover one's defects is one thing, and another to get rid of them. If they accumulate, slowly but surely the soul, in God's pure sight, will appear sadly wounded and bruised. True, it lives—for we are supposing that it has not lost habitual grace—but its life is languid and its progress slow.

It is worthy of notice that although our past grievous sins have been pardoned and may now be little more than a fading memory, they nevertheless have left scars on the soul. Even the bare

memory wounds us sometimes almost to the rending of the heart; and as recovery from a dangerous sickness yet leaves the body enfeebled for many weary months, so rescue from the death of sin is frequently followed by spiritual debility and by a proneness to relapse. Few Religious can be strangers to the strong temptation to despair of God's mercy that wounds the soul when past grievous sins are recalled to mind, nor can they be ignorant of the diffidence that threatens to render fruitless all attempts to rise, to return to the outstretched arms of the Eternal Father, and to repair the past. When, in addition to this native diffidence, God permits the penitent soul to be tortured by the real or imaginary frowns or the studied aversion of neighbours, who apparently doubt the sincerity of his conversion; who can see the depths of his wounds or justly gauge the bitterness of his agony? Alas! far too seldom are the words applied to our Blessed Lord taken to heart by those who have to deal with the erring: "The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not extinguish, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name the Gentiles shall hope" (*St. Matt.* xii. 20, 21). True, it may be that, for some souls, safety lies in being misunderstood, for did full comfort too readily come from creatures, the Divine Physician might be forgotten. May not God be conceived as reserving to Himself the power of healing such gaping wounds? He does not make void His command that the penitent should show himself to the priest for sacramental absolution; but even after forgiveness, such distress of soul may exist as can be assuaged only by His own Divine interposition. He but awaits the fervent cry of the penitent: "Heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee" (*Ps.* xl. 5). "Say to the faint-hearted: Take courage and fear not: behold, your God will bring the revenge of recompense: God himself will come, and will save you" (*Isa.* xxxv. 4).

Again, there are the daily lapses to which all the children of Adam succumb—sins of surprise, mostly caused by neglect of the exercise of the presence of God—that wound the soul, which, created for God and called to His special service, should never be found sleeping at its post. How needful, then, are all the remedies that the Heavenly Physician can give; how eager He is to help; how anxious we should be to avail ourselves of His aid! As Jesus said to the centurion whose servant was sick of the palsy: "I will come and heal him" (*St. Matt.* viii. 7): so the Holy Spirit will say to us, if we invoke Him with faith and confidence, and with a

childlike readiness to accept the remedies, which are ever at hand : the Holy Rule and Constitutions, orders and counsels of superiors, advices of spiritual directors, daily or frequent Communion, prayer and meditation, and a reverent use of the Sacramentals of the Church. We should have a great wish to be healed, and we should be grateful for every help in the curing of our ills : " Were not ten made clean, and where are the nine ?" (*St. Luke* xvii. 17).

Apart from the wounds and bruises brought on ourselves, there may be others permitted as tests of our faith, our patience, our fortitude, or our fidelity in general. Thus was Job afflicted. There is no need to enter into details, as each soul has its own peculiar history ; but no matter how trying our visitation may be, let us remember that, if the Divine Physician hastens to the aid even of those who bring evils on themselves, He will be infinitely more prompt in healing those who are wounded by His own special permission : " Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you " (*St. Matt.* v. 11, 12).

XVI.—FLECTE QUOD EST RIGIDUM

(To Thy sweet yoke our stiff necks bow.)

1. IF perfect obedience were constantly found in the cloister, religious life would be a dream of happiness. In this vale of tears it is to be feared that perfection will never be reached, but if we daily tend towards it the perfection of our holy state will at least be partially realized. "An obedient man shall speak of victory" (*Prov.* xxi. 28). To be victorious over the devil, the world, and the flesh in this life is to merit to reign with God in the next. This object should be our stimulus in keeping the vow of obedience, for, if faithfully observed, it secures for us life everlasting; and, as the final victory cannot be won without many foreshadowings of bliss, the obedient Religious, even here below, finds a rich reward of peace and joy.

Obedience is the noblest of the religious vows. Poverty lightens our material burdens, frees us from worldly cares, and thus smooths our spiritual pathway; chastity strengthens our singleness of purpose (without making us selfish), and purifies our vision of God: "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God" (*St. Matt.* v. 8); but obedience, in fastening us to the Cross, lifts us up with Christ above the sordid earth: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (*St. John* xii. 32). The obedient Religious is, like St. Paul, nailed to the Cross with Christ, for through suffering the reality of obedience is shown: "Whereas indeed he was the Son of God, he learned obedience by the things which he suffered" (*Heb.* v. 8). It was Christ's way to victory over death, and no other way can there be for His followers. "He humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross; for which cause God also hath exalted him, and hath given him a name which is above all names: that in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father" (*Phil.* ii. 8-11).

To be lifted up with Christ, we must first be cast down—like Him we must feel the humiliation of servitude. This humiliation we accepted when, in putting our hands into those of our superiors, we pronounced our vow of obedience, and determined to give up our own will for God's sake. The act was not blind, nor was it

a hasty and ill-considered one; for it was preceded by a trying probation, by painstaking instruction, by searching inquiry into our freedom, our physical, mental, and moral fitness, and by examining our motives for seeking the religious state. Only when those tests were satisfactorily passed were we allowed to put our neck under the yoke—for yoke it was, and yoke it will remain until the end of our lives. We knew it to be a yoke, yet with childlike trust we welcomed it because of the greatness of our love. When, afterwards, the drudgery of the religious life seemed hard even beyond our anticipations, the work proved light and the years short because of our love for Him who had drawn us. "So Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed but a few days, because of the greatness of his love" (*Gen.* xxix. 20). Do not these words bring memories of our youthful days in the cloister? No hour was too early, nor was any hour too late when obedience called. We dissembled our fatigue, made light of our ailments, delighted in hard tasks, and pressed our superiors for permission to do even more. Oh, how we loved the yoke—for it was Christ's—and how sweet, after all, it proved to be! For His sake we loved it, and He for our sake made it sweet; He would not be outdone in generosity. Those were, indeed, generous days, and in spending ourselves we did not count the cost. In rewarding us Jesus gave, now and then, full measure of sweetness—heaped up, pressed down, and overflowing; and if, sometimes, He allowed us to feel that we were all alone in bearing our burden, when He *did* reveal His nearness to us the revelation was a reward beyond our deserts.

If now we find life miserable, time hanging heavily on our hands, the mind void of aim, and the heart robbed of energy, there must be a reason for it, for, as we have seen, our state was not always so. There were periods in our lives when our obedience approached the standard of perfection, and then life was a dream, as we have said, of almost complete happiness. Time flew with lightning rapidity; and because of our submissiveness, all its hours were laden with golden merit. The mind was full of devices as to how we might best work for the glory of God, the good of our neighbour, and our own holiness. On the lofty heights where we lived in those past days, thought chased thought in quick succession; and strong as were our hearts, they were far from being strong enough to perfect all the projects suggested by our loving obedience. God, however, saw our good-

will and He blessed us, for He gave us an insight not to wait for commands but to live and act by counsel. His Spirit was nigh to us and in His light we saw light—we saw that it was, indeed, a sweet and noble thing to obey. In those days the Divine Master's words were more than verified in us: "Take up my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek, and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet, and my burden light" (*St. Matt.* xi. 29, 30).

2. In the course of our Retreat we have seen how generous were the saints in hearkening to the foregoing invitation of Jesus Christ. They felt that, as there could be no holiness of life without burning love, so there could be no love without loyal obedience, seeing that God Himself makes it the test of love: "If you love me, keep my commandments" (*St. John* xi. 15). "You are my friends if you do the things that I command you" (*St. John* xv. 14). The glorious example of the saints had, doubtless, its value in the shaping of our vocation. Now, in studying their lives we found divers gifts and graces, no two saints being alike in their temperament, in their manner of receiving Divine favours, or in their method of using them: "Freely have you received, freely give" (*St. Matt.* x. 8). All the saints, however, were alike in the enthusiasm with which they took up the yoke of Christ, and in the loyalty with which they bore that yoke to the end. They were remarkable for the readiness and for the simplicity of their obedience, which was foolishness to the world, but exalted wisdom in the eyes of God. From human points of view the yoke they bore was a most galling one, for it meant in many cases penury, or persecution, or exile, or death; and the burden laid on them by Christ was in the form of sickness, ceaseless toil, temptations, and miseries of all kinds; yet they flinched not. Learning meekness and humility from their Divine Guide, they gladly accepted the yoke, and lo! it became sweet; they stooped down for the crushing burden, and it suddenly became light; peace came to their souls as it came to the turbulent waves of the sea when Jesus cried: "Peace; be still!" (*St. Mark* iv. 39).

The mocking world in one place heaped up faggots for the destroying fire, in another it turned the thumbscrew or applied the rack; here, men ridiculed those who for Christ's sake made themselves fools; there, they scoffed at the simplicity that

exchanged life itself for belief in a creed or for the preservation of a virtue; but all the while the martyr's soul, the soul of the confessor, the soul of the virgin, was an ocean of undisturbed peace, whose placid waters were lighted up with the gifts of the Spirit. Like Christ their Master they were obedient unto death, and to Him they were frequently lifted up in ecstasy: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the universe they seemed to die: and their departure was taken for misery: and their going away from us, for utter destruction: but they are in peace. . . . Afflicted in few things, in many they shall be well rewarded, because God hath tried them, and found them worthy of Himself" (*Wisd.* iii. 1-5). The Holy Spirit of God thus speaks of the victory of obedience, for it was always through obedience that He tried whether the souls of His chosen ones were "worthy of Himself."

In a later chapter of the Book of Wisdom we read of the delusion of those who ridiculed submission to the Divine yoke: "These are they whom we had sometimes in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints" (*Wisd.* v. 3-5). "Much better is obedience than the victims of fools, who know not what evil they do" (*Eccles.* iv. 17). "Obedience is better than sacrifices" (1 *Kings* xiii. 22).

The saints reasoned not whence came the yoke, or by whom it was put on; they were satisfied to know that it was imposed for justice' sake, for like their Divine Master they wished to fulfil all justice. It sufficed that it was in keeping with God's will, for in the doing of the Heavenly Father's will Christ was their great Exemplar: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, that I may perfect his work" (*St. John* iv. 34). "Burnt offering and sin offering thou didst not require; then said I, 'Behold I come. In the head of the book it is written of me, that I should do thy will: O my God, I have desired it, and thy law in the midst of my heart'" (*Ps.* xxxix. 7). Did they toil—the saints saw the Master in labours from His youth. Were they, in their obediences, humbled and degraded—they remembered that Christ was as a worm and no man. Their obedience was constant, because the great Mysteries of the Incarnation and Redemption were to them living realities, and formed the very atmosphere in which they moved. Bethlehem and Nazareth, Joseph's workshop

and Peter's barque, the palace of Caiphas and the hall of Pilate, Gethsemani and Calvary—the scenes of the obedience of Jesus were, in spirit, worn by their feet and venerated by their lips. Ever lingering in spirit about the sacred spots hallowed by the obedience of Jesus, they realized that, but for His humble subjection to the will of His Eternal Father, they would have been eternally lost. Loving gratitude urged them to tend to the perfection of that virtue, the exercise of which, on the part of Christ, wrought our redemption. Their obedience was marked with all the qualities which we, too, must strive after, if our obedience is to win for us a well-founded hope of reigning with them in bliss. True obedience must be prompt, joyous, blind, internal as well as external, universal and supernatural: in one word, it must be *Christlike*.

3. The foregoing considerations naturally suggest some questions, which in all seriousness we should answer in our hearts: they should lead, with God's grace, to efficacious resolutions—viz., How does our present view of obedience compare with that of our earlier years? In living our religious lives have we been at pains to imitate the saints, reflecting that, in raising them to the honours of the Altar, our Holy Mother the Church means not only to stimulate our devotion, but to urge us to imitate their virtues? As obedience took first place in the ranks of their many virtues, so should it come first in our imitation. Has it done so since our last Retreat? Have we, like the saints, studied obedience at its fountain-head—Christ?

When in our earlier years we pronounced our vow of obedience, we performed the most rational and most noble act of our lives. It was the most rational because obedience is the chief feature in the life of every dependent being; it was the most noble because by that vow we pledged our service to God Himself. Until then we had been playing at submission as children play at soldiering, but our vow of obedience raised our service to the level, and won for us the dignity of martyrdom, for we immolated what was noblest in us—our will. Then, indeed, we were childlike, docile, trustful, and the yoke of obedience, though galling to proud, fallen nature, was robbed of its irritating qualities. If now that yoke irritates and makes us peevish, suspicious, resentful, moody, and ill at ease, the reason can be found in the gradual stiffening of our necks, in the feeling that we have outgrown and are

ashamed of our youthful simplicity and docility. We flatter ourselves that we have lived down what we are pleased to call our "childishness," forgetting that unless we become (and continue to be) as little children, we shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. To be childlike is to be Christlike—there was no trace of childishness in the obedience of Calvary! neither can there be in the obedience of the cloister.

For the renewal of our former spirit how fervently we should cry: "Flecte quod est rigidum!" "To Thy sweet yoke our stiff necks bow!" "O God, if obedience is no longer sweet to me, it is not because Thou art less powerful to infuse a sweetness which once was mine, but because I have grown hard and callous, worldly-minded and carnal. Come, O Holy Spirit, and bend my stubborn will to Thy Divine will. Restore to me, I beseech Thee, the simplicity and the candour of my youth, so that I may once more relish the sweetness which comes from truly childlike obedience."

If we stand self-convicted of disobedience or of laxness in tending to the perfection of the vow and the virtue of obedience, we cannot have lived in the company of the saints; and yet the Church, in Holy Mass and in the Divine Office, takes it for granted that no day shall pass without our thinking of the saint she honours. What can we say in self-defence? Are the Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins, Monks, and Hermits to be for us but meaningless names? Have the saintly Founders of Religious Orders no message for us? In recalling to mind that, radically, the saints are honoured chiefly for their obedience, how we should blush for our effrontery in wearing a habit which typifies humility, meekness, poverty, and *obedience*, all the while that we are practically a law to ourselves. Under God, some great saint of the Church was responsible for our vocation, for we were attracted by his life, inspired by his example, and aided by his prayers. Looking up to that saint to-day, let us confess our ingratitude and our spiritual sloth; let us beseech him to plead with the Holy Ghost that our proud spirit may be tamed. That saint will say to us: "Child, your principal fault is that you do not study obedience at the fountain-head, which is Christ Jesus. In your religious life you have regarded holy obedience as the yoke of the Order, or the yoke of a superior, or a yoke prepared by an enemy or arranged for by a wire-puller; but you have seldom or never regarded it as the yoke of Christ. You

have all unconsciously lost sight of its supernatural character, and therefore you have criticized your superiors, underrated their judgment, discussed their faults and failings, and made little of their commands. You have schemed and planned to avoid what was disagreeable in religious obedience, and have thus resisted the light; you have rejected what was offered you by God through lawful authority, and thus you have laboured without a blessing; you have sought and found your own will, only to the destruction of your sweetness, peace, and joy. No wonder, then, that the yoke has proved unbearable and that you have cast it off. Now that the Spirit of God has visited you, make use of His presence to consider the yoke what it really is—the yoke of Christ: 'Take up *My* yoke upon you'; and remember that when an obedience is in harmony with the commandments of God and His Church, and in keeping with the Holy Rule, it is clearly from God, no matter how unworthy the channel through which it comes, no matter how crude the manner in which it is given. Behind and above the visible superior, behold Christ, the great Invisible Superior, to whom your vow was made. Looking on Him, you will be blind to the failings of His ministers, who would be the last to wish you to regard them as faultless. Jesus, in obeying even unto death, even the death of the Cross, murmured not against His executioners nor against the methods permitted by His Eternal Father. He was passive under the stripping, meek under the scourging, humble under blows, obedient to the end. Be you like unto Him. It was for *your* sake He was obedient. Be you obedient for *His*. He obeyed because of your sins and to win graces for your sanctification—be obedient out of gratitude. O my child, give love for love; for love includes obedience, and obedience love."

Thus would speak all the saints of God. Let it be our life-long effort to reduce their teachings to practice.

XVII.—FOVE QUOD EST FRIGIDUM

(Warm with Thy fire our hearts of snow.)

1. THE mission of the Holy Ghost in all ages is to inflame the hearts of men. He is a burning fire proceeding from the Eternal Father and the Son—Infinite Love with which the Father and the Son are mutually inflamed, and it is His province to kindle a fire of love in the hearts of all rational beings. Only sheer obstinacy and deliberate persistence in evil can stifle those penetrating flames. The merest chink of tenderness, good feeling, or penitence in the heart of the most reprobate will open a way for the Living Fire which comes down from Heaven. How evil, then, must be the heart that resists to the bitter end! No wonder that Christ regarded such resistance as the one unpardonable sin. "But he that shall speak against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world nor in the world to come" (*St. Matt.* xii. 32). God forbid that the cloister should ever be desecrated by such a crime!

We have more than once meditated on the visitations of the Holy Ghost in the Old Law in the exercise of His mission. The fire that He cast on the earth was the kindling of a flame in man for the destruction of man's vicious inclinations and the purification and elevation of his soul. Happy they who knew the day of their visitation and co-operated with His merciful and loving desires! They were saved from the wrath to come, made His elect, and set up as models for all who should come after them. "And the Lord looked upon the children of Israel, and he knew them. . . . And the Lord appeared to him [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he saw that the bush was on fire and was not burnt" (*Exod.* ii. 25; iii. 2). Thus did the Holy Ghost, in fire and flame, inaugurate the deliverance of the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage, nor did He withdraw His miraculous aid until the people were assured of safety. "And the Lord went before them to show the way, by day in a pillar of cloud, and by night in a pillar of fire: that he might be the guide of their journey at both times. There never failed the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, before the people" (*Exod.* xiii. 21, 22). Did not the Spirit move over the water of the Red Sea on that eventful night when "the Lord took it away by a strong and burning wind blowing all the night, and turning it

into dry ground: and the water was divided" (*Exod.* xv. 21)? These events were forerunners of the greater wonders to be wrought on Sinai's heights. "And now the third day was come, and the morning appeared: and behold, thunders began to be heard, and lightnings to flash . . . and when Moses had brought them forth to meet God, from the place of the camp, they stood at the bottom of the mount. And all Mount Sinai was on a smoke; because the Lord was come down upon it in fire, and the smoke arose from it as out of a furnace: and all the mount was terrible" (*Exod.* xix. 16-18). "And the glory of the Lord dwelt upon Sinai, covering it with a cloud six days: and the seventh day he called him out of the midst of the cloud. And the sight of the glory of the Lord was like a burning fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel" (*Exod.* xxiv. 16). Need we be astonished that eventually, through repeated communings with God, Moses in descending from the mount had his head horned with rays of light? "And when Moses came down from the Mount Sinai, he held the two tables of the testimony, and he knew not that his face was horned from the conversation of the Lord. And Aaron and the children of Israel seeing the face of Moses horned, were afraid to come near" (*Exod.* xxxiv. 29, 30).

It needs no stretch of the imagination to understand how those repeated manifestations were of a nature to impress the minds and melt the hearts of the Israelites, notwithstanding their proneness to doubt and ingratitude. "And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the testimony, and afterwards came forth and blessed the people. And the glory of the Lord appeared to all the multitude. And behold a fire, coming forth from the Lord, devoured the holocaust, and the fat that was on the altar; which when the multitude saw, they praised the Lord, falling on their faces" (*Lev.* ix. 23, 24). The manifestations were, moreover, adapted to fill the people with wholesome fear, lest that fire of love might, because of their sins, be changed into a vengeful one: "A fire shall go before him and shall burn his enemies round about" (*Ps.* xcvi. 3). "The Lord will come with fire . . . to render his wrath in indignation, and his rebuke with flames of fire" (*Isa.* lvi. 15).

2. Thus was the way prepared for the coming of the Messiah, whose mission was to develop and to seal with His Precious Blood

the message given in previous ages by the Holy Spirit. "I am come to cast fire on the earth; and what will I but that it be kindled?" (*St. Luke* xii. 49). That fire, as we gather from His own lips, meant life, light, truth, friendship, and union. It was a consuming fire, to purge man of his littleness and to endow him with power to become even heroic in virtue. "I am the way, the truth and the life" (*St. John* xiv. 6). "I am the light of the world. He that followeth me walketh not in darkness but shall have the light of life" (*St. John* viii. 12). "You are my friends if you do the things that I command you" (*St. John* xv. 14). "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that shall lose his life for me shall find it" (*St. Matt.* x. 39).

In our previous meditations we have seen how the fervour of the spiritual life is ever in danger of being lost through contact with the chilling atmosphere of the world, to which must be added the lowering influence of our poor fallen nature and the benumbing effects of diabolical temptation. Unless the soul co-operates heartily with Christ in His wish "to cast fire on the earth," its original fervour will soon be reduced to freezing-point. The fluctuations of spirituality in all ages and in all countries can be accounted for by a study of our own experiences. From the time that we began to note those experiences (by taking our religious life seriously) we have been made aware of constant variations in our spiritual state. The Holy Ghost has repeatedly inflamed us with burning love, and kindled in us an enthusiasm capable of supporting us—if need be—at the stake; but alas! that warmth has been lost through our personal neglect. The Holy Spirit kindled the fire, but we took little or no pains to keep it alive, although all the needful means were at hand. In the Holy Mass we were daily reminded of the fire of love that consumed our Blessed Saviour on Calvary; and in Holy Communion we were allowed the privilege of uniting our hearts with His, so that they might at once melt away with gratitude and become strong in the spirit of sacrifice. Attached to our daily duties were graces which hovered over us like tongues of fire, illuminating the mind and strengthening the will. Our Blessed Mother with the saints and angels, like a heavenly constellation, shone on our pathway to make our way to God surer and safer; but alas! how frequently we neglected or refused to avail ourselves of all those means so generously provided by the Holy Spirit to warm our hearts of snow.

Thus, our personal experiences enable us to see in miniature

the spiritual history of the world. The preaching of Jesus, the humiliations of His passion and His death on Calvary, were so many Divine efforts to melt the icy hearts of men. All the incidents in His life were directed to the same end, for that was the work entrusted to Him by His Divine Father; and after the work was accomplished and He had ascended into Heaven, the Paraclete, whom He had promised, came down to make it perfect. He came in Pentecostal fire, and from that time, in every epoch, fire has come down from Heaven to soften and to warm hearts that would be otherwise hard and cold.

Did not celestial fire touch the lips of the Apologists in the early centuries of Christianity, when charity was growing cold and men were tempted to return to the flesh-pots of Egypt? What else but heavenly fire could have sustained the Martyrs in the general persecutions that decimated the Early Church? And when the Dark Ages dawned and lasted so long as to make the faithful few almost fear for the very existence of Christianity, was it not the fire of a St. Bernard that, under God, rekindled hopes which were wellnigh extinguished? Whence came that fire but from the Holy Spirit whom the Father sent, on the pleading of Christ, to perpetuate the Office which, while He was on earth, was His own? "And I will ask the Father, and he shall give you another Paraclete, that he may abide with you for ever" (*St. John* xiv. 16). "And when he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of justice, and of judgment" (*St. John* xvi. 8).

In the thirteenth century pride, avarice, and luxury again chilled the hearts of men, and even the sanctuary was losing all its spiritual warmth, when fire was sent down from Heaven in the person of St. Dominic and St. Francis, who, like Moses and Aaron, by their leadership, prayer, preaching, and penance, were the saviours of the people to whom they had been sent by the Spirit of God. Alas! some generations after there came a revival of paganism in art and literature, and side by side with it the mocking, sneering spirit that is ever the accompaniment of licence; but the Holy Ghost, true to His mission, sent men fire-tried in the furnace of affliction to stem the tide of heresy, and once more the Christian world was saved. St. Ignatius and St. Francis de Sales, St. Alphonsus and St. Philip Neri, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Teresa, and St. Jane Frances de Chantal, rise before us, and as we look on them Pentecost seems to be repeated: tongues of fire are over their heads, intrepidity fires their hearts, and their souls are all aglow

with heavenly unction. Yet, in the designs of God it was not enough, for the spiritual coldness in those days was too intense to be dispelled by warmth that, although coming from Heaven, was after all conveyed through human mediums. *Christ Himself came* to send a Fiery Cross all over the world to illumine minds that were in darkness and to melt hearts that were cold and hard. That Fiery Cross was Devotion to His own most Sacred Heart.

3. True to His method in all the ages, our Blessed Lord chose the meek and humble of heart to be His special messenger. In the first of the four great revelations with which St. Margaret Mary was favoured, our Divine Lord said to her: "I have chosen thee, as a very abyss of unworthiness and ignorance, for the accomplishment of this great design, in order that all may be done by Me." During eighteen months He repeatedly appeared, revealing to her—for our sake—the ardour of His love for men, and bewailing the coldness with which He was treated. "The Divine Heart was shown on a throne of flames: it was more resplendent than the sun and transparent as crystal; it had its own adorable wound, and was surrounded by a crown of thorns, and there was a cross above it."* The favoured saint continues: "He showed me also that the ardent desire that He had of being loved by men, and of rescuing them from the path of perdition, had made Him form the design of manifesting His Heart to them, with all the treasures of love, of graces, of sanctification, and salvation which it contains, in order that he might enrich all who were willing to render to it, and procure for it, all the love, honour, and glory in their power, with the profusion of those Divine treasures of the Heart of a God from which they spring" (*loc. cit.*, pp. 124, 125). Subsequently, St. Margaret Mary writes: "Jesus Christ, my gentle Master, presented Himself to me, all resplendent with glory, His five wounds shining like so many suns. From his Sacred Humanity issued flames on all sides, especially from His adorable breast, which resembled a furnace, and which was open, disclosing to me His most loving and most lovable Heart, the living source of these flames. It was then that He discovered to me the unspeakable wonders of His pure love, and to what excess He had gone in loving men from whom He received only ingratitude and neglect, 'which I feel much more' (He said) 'than all that I suffered in My Passion. If only they made Me some return for My love, I

* *Blessed Margaret Mary* (the Saints Series), p. 124.

should think but little of all that I have done for them, and should wish, if it were possible, to do yet more. But they have only coldness and rebuffs to give Me in return for all My eagerness to do them good.' He appeared a year afterwards, uncovered His Divine Heart, and said: 'Behold this Heart which hath so much loved men, that it hath spared nothing, even to exhausting and consuming itself, in order to give them testimony of its love, and in return I mostly receive only ingratitude, through their irreverence and sacrilege, and through the coldness and scorn that they have for Me in this Sacrament of Love. What causes Me most sorrow is that there are hearts consecrated to Me who treat Me thus'" (*loc. cit.*, p. 133).

The foregoing words are at once a reproach to us and an answer to our supplication: a reproach because of our admitted ingratitude for the Divine favours heaped upon us in the past, an answer to our prayer inasmuch as we have here disclosed to us the revealed method of warming our hearts of snow. We are to draw near to the furnace of Divine Love that is ever active in the Blessed Sacrament. All that we do in God's name will increase the warmth of our soul through the infusion of grace; but the most direct and efficacious means of changing our hearts of snow into hearts burning with Divine Love is to receive the *Author of Grace* daily, or frequently, in Holy Communion. This miraculous fire was kindled by Him at the Last Supper, and since then it has never been lost to the earth. In every place, from the rising of the sun until the going down, Christ is with His people to feed them with the Bread of Life, which destroys evil passions all the while that it sustains and nourishes every virtue. To the end of time our Blessed Lord meant it to be the saving remedy for all the chills caused by contact with the world and by the weakness of the flesh. If, as we have seen, the fire of love was rekindled in bygone days by Apologists, Martyrs, and Confessors, it was chiefly because they made the Blessed Sacrament the centre around which turned all their thoughts, as it was the source from which they drew their inspiration, their zeal, their piety, and their constancy. Since its institution the Blessed Sacrament has been the divinely appointed means of reviving love that had languished, and of deepening and refining love that had never failed. So must it be now: so must it be in all time, for God thus wills it: "He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me. . . . He that eateth this bread shall live for ever" (*St. John* vi. 58, 59).

In bewailing our past coldness let us rejoice that we are privileged to live in an age in which the Blessed Sacrament may be said, with all reverence, to have come into its own. It is the age of Eucharistic Congresses, and for us Religious it is significant that St. Paschal Baylon, once a poor Franciscan lay brother, was chosen by the saintly Pontiff, Pius X., to be the patron of all such gatherings. This should remind us that we who live under the same roof with Jesus in His Sacramental presence are His special guardians, and that our guardianship, to be pleasing to Him, should lead us often to His feet to have the spiritual warmth of our hearts restored, if unhappily lost—to have it intensified, if already aglow. Keeping watch and guard before the Tabernacle like St. Margaret Mary, our growing love for Jesus will preserve us from the reproaches launched by Him against those consecrated to His service whose coldness displeased Him. Far from reproaching us, He will reward our fidelity by revealing to us the secrets of His Divine Heart, and will make our poor human hearts like to His own.

4. Although it is a truism in the spiritual life that God will never be outdone in generosity, only the few have the courage to make sacrifices. This is especially the case with regard to devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, for the time spent in its presence, if not grudgingly given, is nevertheless not given with that abandonment which is so pleasing to God. "For God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 *Cor.* ix. 7). In many cases this arises less from want of goodwill than from the pressure of other duties or from the impossibility of visiting the Blessed Sacrament, for, although free, we may not be in its immediate neighbourhood. When, however, there is ready access to the chapel or oratory, no day should be allowed to pass without a private visit to the Divine Host, who deigns to dwell amongst us with a view to teach, strengthen, and console all who approach Him with proper dispositions. "Cast thy care upon him, for he hath care of thee" (1 *St. Pet.* v. 6, 7).

In modern times there have been many shining examples of saintly souls who, notwithstanding their arduous labours, spent hours before the Blessed Sacrament, and obtained thereby abundant light on their own spiritual and temporal affairs, and received special help for the direction of others. Those familiar with recent biography will recall to mind many honoured names ; and all who follow with interest the progress of the Church will find

special delight in dwelling on the ever-increasing number of priest-adorers, and on the remarkable development of the Eucharistic League and the Devotion of the Holy Hour. Another source of gratification is the existence of religious bodies devoted to perpetual adoration, the extraordinary attraction to the contemplative life—of which the Blessed Sacrament is the very soul—and the prominence given to the Devotion of the Forty Hours.

These reflections should stimulate us to make the best possible use of our opportunities, for it would be unpardonable if we were less zealous than the devout laity in paying due honour to the Real Presence. A resolution to be prepared to make sacrifices for the attainment of greater devotion should be one of the fruits of this Retreat.

The visit to the Blessed Sacrament would acquire an interest in which many Religious are lacking, if it were paid like other visits. When a friend is visited he is allowed to have his share of the conversation, but this is seldom the case when our one true Friend is visited in the Blessed Sacrament. We repeat the usual Acts, read out of a manual, recite some vocal prayers, pour out our hearts as best we can in adoration and thanksgiving, but we do not pause for the whisperings of Christ, whom we believe to be really, truly, and substantially present. Is not this, indeed, a one-sided visit? If we really thought in the heart, would it not savour of imperfect trust? It is a thing never done in ordinary life, for in visiting those in exalted station we respectfully allow *them* to speak. This should be done when we visit our Blessed Lord. After paying our respects we should say: "And now, O sweet Saviour, I humbly await Thy commands. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. I seek light in my difficulties . . . strength in my weaknesses . . . consolation in my sorrows . . ." After the request is made, *let us pause for the answer which our Lord may deign to give*. There need be no fear of sentimentality or danger of exaltation, for the thoughts that Jesus inspires will be in full conformity with His Divine Law. *Should* a seemingly strange message come, it can easily be tested by His Law and by our rule and constitutions, for whatever is contradictory to Law cannot be from God. If we give our Blessed Lord time to speak, He will make the way of obedience clearer to us by suggesting thoughts of *His* obedience; and the same is true with regard to humility, penance, and other virtues. We shall find Him chiding us for our waywardness, our sloth, our tepidity, or our ruling passion for

the time being, but He will end by filling us with consolation. To *pause*, to *wait* for some salutary thought is really an essential part of the visit, as can be understood by an appeal to our methods in visiting high superiors ; for it is not what *we* say to the great ones of the earth that matters, but what *they* say to us. In the same way, in visiting the Blessed Sacrament let us by all means pay our respects with becoming fervour, but let us remember that it must necessarily prove an unsatisfactory visit unless time is given to our Divine Host to open His Heart to us for our instruction, our strength, and our consolation.

XVIII.—REGE QUOD EST DEVIUM

(Our wandering feet repeal.)

1. IN the Parable of the Prodigal Son our Blessed Lord pictures the impatience of man under lawful authority, his wish to be a law to himself, and the evil results of withdrawing himself from safe guidance. The parable was meant to be retold and commented on till the end of time. In the foregoing meditations we have more than once tried to comply with our Lord's wishes by reflecting on the waywardness of man, and on the pity and compassion of the Heavenly Father in receiving him back when he has seen and sorrowed over the error of his ways. We have meditated on "the portion of the substance" which every child of God has received through the merits of Christ, and have followed the Prodigal into the distant country where all his substance was wasted in living riotously. The distant country may be no farther removed than the place in which one was born and bred, for there may be "rioting" in the mind, or in the heart, or in one's members; and in each or all of these ways the precious substance of grace may be lost. After the loss no one can give unto the Prodigal but the very God whose bounty has been abused; for neither the devils who tempted nor the companions who co-operated in his sins can restore the graces that they have helped to squander. In his loneliness—and who is more lonely than the poor sinner?—he finds no help coming but from the God whom he has so deeply offended; in his misery and degradation his only hope of restoration to peace and honour is in God, for by all others he is disowned and despised.

The strange tendency of man to stray from his Heavenly Father's home and to seek his happiness elsewhere has been noticeable in every epoch. In tracing the history of the Jews we have frequently grieved over it; and it has distressed us to follow the course of nations once favoured with the light of the Gospel. Even to this day Almighty God is forced to ask: "O my people, what have I done to thee or in what have I molested thee? Answer thou me" (*Mich.* vi. 3). What answer can be given by the sinner but that the substance provided through the merits of the Precious Blood has been wasted, that Heaven-sent Manna has been discarded for the flesh-pots of Egypt, that the Creator has been rejected for the creature, and that only when lowered to the

level of the swine does ungrateful man realize the worth of the possessions he has lost and the splendour of the home he has abandoned. Happy the man who, entering into himself, acknowledges that God has been infinitely kind, and, far from molesting him, has most generously helped him in all his needs.

Alas! it is to be feared that from some dark periods in history and from some polluted lips no answer to the complaint of Almighty God has come: "*Our wandering feet repeal.*" Some wandering feet have never been "repealed" in the sense of reparation having been publicly made for misdeeds that scandalized the world. Seemingly abandoned to a reprobate sense, nations have not risen from apostasy, and sinners have not been reclaimed. Some names will rise unbidden to the lips. We dare not judge—for the mercies of God are inscrutable—but we are justified in saying that, if some historic tyrants died as they lived, their end must have been unholy. After our own repeated wanderings from our Father's home and our prodigal waste of grace, we, too, might well tremble for our safety, but that the conversion of great sinners rises before us as an object-lesson of hope, provided that we, like the Prodigal, cry: "I will arise and will go to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee: I am not now worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants" (*St. Luke* xv. 18, 19).

The thorny road that has been trodden by St. Peter and St. Paul, by St. Mary Magdalene, St. Augustine, and the other well-known penitents, is surely not strange to us! Dare we hope to have our supernatural substance restored to us by choosing easier pathways or by leading lives of ease and pleasure? If therefore we have followed the great sinners in their wanderings from God, let us imitate them as true penitents in returning by the pathway of tears and penance.

2. In what may be called lesser ways, how we have squandered our substance in the different stages of our lives! Consider the years that passed without fully understanding we were on earth for a definite purpose: oh, the wasted hours of youth, and the many meaningless wanderings caused by the want of a definite goal! When, at length, a sure and safe objective was pointed out to us by the Spirit of God, how slowly we moved towards it; for who has not wavered in following his vocation? who has not

longed for home comforts once generously sacrificed? who has not stealthily taken away with one hand what he gave with the other? Alas! we have been inconstant, timid, selfish, suspicious, singular, moody, and ungrateful. We who were once so generous, have with the passing years grown self-centred and narrow; we who became Religious with a view to salutary penance for our sins, have outgrown our past resolutions and now grumble at the slightest inconvenience; we who, perhaps, surrendered much, now grow angry if our slightest whim is thwarted or our wishes denied. Whereas in the early days of our religious lives we were eager to sacrifice ourselves in the service of the Lord, we now find it hard to perform ordinary duties. Having lost our high ideals, we remain for years on the level of mediocrity, yet sometimes have the hardihood to blame our Institute for limitations that are really the results of our own sloth. We waste time and energy on non-essentials, and fritter away our lives through lack of motive. Unmindful of the admonition of St. Paul, we mind worldly things. Our idleness makes us members of the family of "Brother Fly," reprobated by St. Francis of Assisi.

Are not these so many proofs that, although we are still in the religious state, we have, nevertheless, wandered into byways? Are we not far from the road traced by Jesus Christ and followed by our Blessed Mother and the saints? And if we are not with Christ on that road, how can we be for Him? "He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (*St. Matt.* xii. 30). Oh, let us humbly and sorrowfully admit that we are wanderers from the pathway of perfection; let us fear—not with the fear of slaves, but with the fear of sons—lest we should be benighted and lose the path altogether; for he that neglects small things shall fall by little and by little. Let us fervently beseech the Holy Spirit to recall our wandering feet ere the night overtakes us. Let us work while yet there is time: "I must work the works of him that sent me while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (*St. John* ix. 4). O Mary! deign to take us by the hand and lead us back to the pathway of duty, that we may become steady travellers on the way to perfection, rather than wanderers in the byways of tepidity.

3. When night is closing in, the traveller who has lost his way brings his day-dreams to an abrupt end. He loses no time in vain regrets, but eagerly seeks direction from those within reach, or, if

far from human habitation, takes his bearings as well as he can and strives to regain the true road. His self-reproaches over past carelessness may be deep and loud, but he knows they will ring hollow, unless they lead him to be more painstaking in the future. Would that we, in finding that we have wandered from the path of duty, acted with like prudence; for our mistakes, through frequent repetition, often become a second nature. Indeed, some Religious seem to glory in their "absentmindedness," as they choose to call it, and the schoolboy's excuse: "I forgot!" is ever on their lips. In the sense in which we are now speaking, a Religious should not forget—an observant Religious *cannot* forget, for he finds finger-posts all along the route that leads to the Holy Mountain of God. If we keep to the beaten track of observance, we shall always be in the company of those who are bent on reaching the goal, and who are guided by the laws of God and His Holy Church, and by the rule and constitutions of the Institute. These are sure and safe indicators, which admit of no doubt as to the path to be followed. If, by way of exception, doubt should arise, there will be some reliable friend within reach capable of putting us right; and if, owing to our peculiar difficulties, even he should fail, the Holy Spirit Himself will come to our assistance, if we ask with humility, confidence, and perseverance. With regard to spiritual direction, it is the doctrine of St. Francis de Sales that if a soul anxious to make progress in the spiritual life be debarred from or deprived of spiritual help suitable to its needs, the Holy Ghost will supply it by His interior light, for as He wishes the end, He will supply the means. God is infinitely desirous of our salvation and sanctification, and will, therefore, light up our pathway if we only ask with the proper dispositions. Even when we stray, He Himself will lead us back to safety, if the ordinary means of reconciliation are not within reach; as every Catholic child knows who has grasped the distinction between perfect and imperfect contrition.

It is here we most frequently fail, for when we fear we are off the beaten track—nay, when we are sure of our benightedness—pride seals our lips against asking advice and obstinacy keeps our feet on the wrong road. If advice is charitably volunteered or a warning seriously given, we often scorn the one or neglect the other, and thus walk headlong into danger: "None so blind as they who will not see." In this there lies hidden great possibilities for evil, for in the maze of life one needs a guide, not such a guide as

would rob one of initiative and individuality, or who would frown down all zealous efforts, but one who would be ever in reserve to reassure us when we hesitate and correct us when we err. Judicious superiors and observant Religious are guides of this sort, but they are too often unrecognized. In difficulties they are seldom consulted, and when a false step is made their rebukes are resented. The guides mostly followed are those who flatter our whims and fancies—no wonder then that the pathway of rectitude is so often lost: "Let them alone: they are blind, and leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit" (*St. Matt.* xv. 14).

It is obvious that above all other guides we should honour the Holy Ghost, who holds in His hands the extremities of the earth and rules all things sweetly. Fidelity to His law, receptiveness of His inspirations, and reverence for His ministers are the conditions necessary for the "repeal" of our wandering feet. In our religious lives we should study precision, decision, and promptitude, qualities needful for all journeyings, but especially for that long and toilsome journey which ends at the Gate of Heaven. We must be precise in the knowledge of our vows, our rule and our constitutions; decisive in our resolutions to be observant, and prompt in the execution of our daily duties, as well as in following the light that may come from above. The proof that a light comes from on high and not from our own self-love lies in its harmony with the Divine Law. If we feel that we have wandered from our original fervour, humble examination of conscience, aided by the Holy Spirit, will doubtless show us that our study of spirituality has been superficial, and that, therefore, our way has not been clearly defined. When there is haziness in the understanding there cannot be decision in the will; when decision is wanting, there cannot be promptitude in following the line of duty. Let our cry then be: "O Lord, that I may see! O Lord, grant that seeing right I may recover my lost fervour, and with it such decision and promptitude as with Thy grace will enable me to persevere in the pathway of Thy Law, even to the end. Amen."

XIX.

Da tuis fidelibus
In te confidentibus
Sacrum Septenarium.

(Grant to Thy faithful, dearest Lord,
Whose only hope is Thy sure word,
The Seven Gifts of Thy Spirit.)

1. HUMBLY trusting that through the merits of Christ we are worthy to be numbered with the faithful, we now invoke the Holy Spirit to make His sanctifying grace in us more and more fruitful, for unto this we are called: "And he that is just, let him be justified still: and he that is holy, let him be sanctified still" (*Apoc.* xxii. 11). The possession of sanctifying grace is the essential condition for the reception of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, but once they are received, they by their activity increase that grace. Humbly sought, generously given, gratefully received, and loyally co-operated with, they enhance the strength and grandeur of the soul. Faith, Hope, and Charity already there are, by the influence of the Seven Gifts, moved to supreme efforts, with results at which the world is sometimes amazed, for it finds the lowly achieving successes in the moral order that are denied to those who seek not the grace of God.

How inspiriting is the thought that we who are so conscious of our infirmities should be favoured with the gifts which were to fill the human soul of our Divine Lord in His Incarnation! How eagerly we should seek them and how well we should use them! How we should fear lest, through any fault on our part, the precious legacy should be denied us. How we should tremble lest, after having been given, those gifts should through our neglect prove fruitless; for, as we have seen, they have been purchased at a great price, and are given to us that we may co-operate with the Giver, who, through His indwelling in the soul, is ever at hand to help us in using them to our advantage.

Left to ourselves how likely we should be to forget our destiny, which is Heaven, and even when mindful how feeble should we be in our efforts to attain it; but God in His goodness has blessed us with the Sevenfold Gift of the Holy Spirit. Infused with sanctifying grace, those gifts furnish the soul with supernatural

capacity for receiving the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, and with supernatural readiness to obey His promptings in all important matters pertaining to salvation. They urge the soul to heroic acts through the impulse given by the Holy Spirit. What a privilege it is to be thus roused from our sloth and pushed on to good works far beyond the powers of unaided nature. As the gifts are given to move us to virtuous actions, how ungrateful we should be if we stood all the day idle. What excuse could we offer to the Master of the Vineyard, who has not only called upon us to labour, but has most generously provided us with the means to make that labour fruitful? It is our duty, therefore, to show our gratitude by co-operating with God in the good work which He wishes to effect in our souls.

Scripture does not leave us in doubt as to the number of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, nor do spiritual writers fail to enlighten us regarding their nature and their effects. Isaias, in foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ, describes how the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, who is our Head, and of whom we are the members. The gifts, therefore, that were His from the moment of His Incarnation, are also ours, as long as we remain in the state of sanctifying grace. They were in Jesus Christ in all their fulness; they are in us in such measure as the Holy Spirit sees good for our sanctification. "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him: the Spirit of Wisdom and of Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and of Fortitude, the Spirit of Knowledge and of Godliness; and he shall be filled with the Spirit of the Fear of the Lord" (*Isa.* xi. 1-3). The very names of the gifts indicate how well adapted they are to render the soul more and more perfect in proportion to its docility to the promptings of the Holy Ghost. As they are given only for the perfecting of the soul that is in the state of grace, it follows that when grace is forfeited by mortal sin the gifts also are lost. Theologians say that they are not more perfect than the theological virtues, but are ordained to the *perfection* of those virtues, as to their end. They all act together, though some may be more fully developed than others, and, like gifts in the natural order, one may be more prominent than another. Under their influence Faith becomes more active, Hope more constant, Charity more ardent. To the supernatural fire ever burning in the souls of the children of God, the gifts add fresh fuel: powers that were latent are roused to

activity; faculties that seemed non-existent are revealed. From experience as well as from history we learn how marvellous have been the effects of the Sevenfold Gift even in the weak and ignorant: "The Spirit of the Lord hath filled the whole world, and that which containeth all things hath knowledge of the voice" (*Wisd.* i. 7).

2. What a gloomy contrast to the foregoing picture is presented by those who through their misdeeds are found unworthy of the gifts of God. The ghastly contrast presented by a corpse is nothing compared with this, for although the separation of the soul from the body has robbed the latter of its activities and prepared the way for corruption, there remains for a time a strange nobility even in the corpse. Features that in life were plain are now pleasing; the once wrinkled brow is at last smooth; the lips, though now chilled in death, are wreathed in a smile that was seldom or never seen before. Not so when the life of the soul is lost; before losing grace it was an object of delight in the sight of God and man, but now it is changed beyond recognition. There is in it neither beauty nor usefulness, for it is robbed of the grace of God, which was its very life and the fount of all its beauty and usefulness: moreover, as we have seen, it is likewise robbed of the gifts provided for its greater sanctification. Once it was a favoured soul loved by God, dear to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, worthy of the praise of its Angel Guardian; once its possessions were greater than all the riches of the world; for the Faith that enabled it to see, the Hope that sustained it in trials, the Charity that urged it to good works, the four moral virtues that strengthened it, and the Seven Gifts that made the other Divine favours more and more fruitful were, as we have already considered, the fruits of the Precious Blood. And now all are lost! The man lives and moves, but he is, nevertheless, dead; he lives to the world, but he is dead to Heaven; he moves, but his feet are not found scaling the heights that lead to bliss; they are sliding down the slopes that lead to perdition. He thinks, but his musings are void of understanding; he acts, but without wisdom; he knows, but his knowledge is of vain things; he deliberates, but foolishly, for the gift of counsel has been lost; he strives, but no longer with the giant strength of the faithful Christian, for, like Samson, his locks have been shorn—fortitude (in which lay his strength) having been forfeited; his lips move, but he prays not,

for piety has vanished; he fears, but his fear is no longer that of the children of the Father—it is a slavish fear of the world, which is the enemy of God.

Who could wish such a fate for his worst enemy? Who would not gladly suffer martyrdom rather than prepare such a fate for himself? And yet it is a fate that has overtaken many who were once the friends of Christ and honoured ones in His Church. *Oh, how we should fear!*

Fear, which is "the beginning of wisdom" (*Prov.* i. 7), ranks first in the ascending scale of the Seven Gifts. "The root of wisdom is to fear the Lord and the branches thereof are long lived" (*Ecclus.* i. 25). As the root is virtually the tree, fear, according to St. Thomas, may be called wisdom. "The fear of God not only begins, but also perfects wisdom, whereby we love God above all things and our neighbour as ourselves" (II., Q. 83).

From the words of our Divine Lord we learn that there is a fear which is against even natural reason—viz., that which leads a man to forsake justice lest he should lose life or temporal goods: "Fear ye not them that kill the body and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body into hell" (*St. Matt.* x. 28). This is worldly fear, which springs from worldly love as from an evil root, and leads a man to trust in the world as his end. It has been responsible for many historical failures, which in this Retreat we have so often deplored. Fear of death or of the forfeiture of worldly possessions has led to innumerable apostasies; fear of earthly rulers has more than once wrested nations from the unity of the Church; fear of corporal suffering has, in some instances, robbed would-be martyrs of their crowns; fear of what the world would say has, to this very hour, stopped thousands at the very threshold of the Church; and this selfsame fear of the world is occasionally responsible for many imperfections on the part of Religious.

This being so, we should examine whether we are free from its taint, for if we are led by human respect to omit the least of our religious observances, we stand convicted of that ignoble fear which is so offensive to the Spirit of God. Through such fear St. Peter fell, whereas by conquering it St. Mary Magdalene rose from her iniquities. When the prodigal cried: "I will arise and go to my father," he was assailed by temptations to fear his elder brother and those of like temperament in his old home; but his filial fear prevailed. Many penitents are held back from doing

great things for God through fear of those who, it is thought, would be likely to gibe at their "presumption."

Let us ask ourselves whether we fear the loss of health when a certain task is imposed, or when an insalubrious spot is fixed upon as our destination; whether we fear to be exact, lest the lukewarm should accuse us of courting the favour of superiors; or, if we ourselves are superiors, whether the fear of criticism leads us so to slacken the reins of authority as to endanger discipline, and lead our successors in office to be regarded as tyrants. These are but a few out of many questions that we do well to put to ourselves, lest we should wake up one day and find ourselves victims to ignoble worldly fear. It needs only a slight exercise of memory to convince ourselves that most of our past cowardice in the service of God arose from the fear we are speaking of. We doubtless blushed for our weakness, and reproached ourselves for our cowardice; but alas! we did not pray with perseverance for the gift of holy fear, which alone could cast out all that was unworthy. "Perfect charity casteth out fear" (1 *St. John* iv. 18). With perfect love cometh the gift of holy fear, but as we loved not in those days of sin, we were deprived of God's gift. May the chastening of our spirit in this Retreat make us worthy to receive it, and may its activity within us extinguish all smoulderings of worldly fear.

3. St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans, viii. 15, gives us his view of servile fear when he says: "If a man do anything through fear, although the deed be good, it is not well done." Servile fear, which proceeds from the fear of God's punishments, and seems to say, "Were it not for the punishment I should not restrain myself from evil, nor should I do good," is, according to St. Thomas, substantially good, for it recognizes infinite justice; but its servility is evil, for servitude, as the saint says, is opposed to freedom. One who acts through love, acts of himself, so to speak; but servile fear, as such, is opposed to love and is thus vitiated. Servile fear, says the Angelic Doctor, as to its substance is not born of pride, but its servility is, inasmuch as man is unwilling by love to subject his affections to the yoke of justice. We should be rash if we condemned this fear; much is gained if a man turns from sin, even although the motive be simply fear of punishment, for he cannot turn from sin without turning to God, and even a dim view of the infinitely tender Father will dispose him to purify

his fear from servility. "Who shall not fear thee, O king of nations?" (*Jer.* x. 7). While we fear, we hope. We fear God's justice, we hope in His mercy. Responding to God's call from sin to the better life, the penitent will gradually see his faults more clearly, and in sorrowing over them he will do so as a stricken child, fearing to offend God, who has been so merciful and compassionate. "And now, Israel, what doth thy God require of thee, but that thou fear the Lord thy God?" (*Deut.* x. 12). This is, at least, a beginning of filial fear, and joined to servile fear it becomes what is called initial fear, in which filial fear predominates. Initial fear stands in the same relation to filial fear as imperfect to perfect charity, and thus there is no *essential* difference between the two. Under the influence of initial fear the horizon of the soul widens, the spiritual sky is more serene, fear is less slavish, God's justice is more and more merged in the ocean of His mercy, the hitherto stricken soul breathes more freely, and feels that the best gifts of God are also its portion. Oh, the glad awakening! The penitent now abhors the abyss from which he has been delivered, he hates the sins that caused the shedding of the Precious Blood, deplores wasted hours and blighted energies, finds his faith increasing and his hopes gathering new strength, realizes that charity is expanding and softening the heart that was so narrow and so hard, and ends by longing for the life that is eternal, and by resolving to grudge no pains that may be needed to secure it. He feels that St. Paul is speaking to his inmost self, and he is now ready for the great gift of filial fear from the Holy Spirit of God, who has thus led him from darkness to light. "For you have not received the spirit of bondage again in fear: but you have received the spirit of adoption of sons, whereby we cry: Abba (Father)" (*Rom.* viii. 15).

Contrite, pardoned, and restored to the state of sanctifying grace, he who could scarcely look up through sheer terror, or whose fear was imperfect, is now endowed by God with holy fear. He sees God with purified eyes and recognizes that He is, indeed, a *Father*. How he rejoices in his adoption as a son! Yet how he fears with filial fear! Filled with awe at the stupendous nature of the gift, his first feeling is one of deep reverence. Hitherto God was regarded as a Judge, a severe Taskmaster, and was feared as such, but now that He reveals himself as an infinitely tender Father, apprehended thus, servile and imperfect fear melts away as mist disappears at the approach of dawn, and

holy filial fear comes with all its light and warmth to brighten the life of the child of God. As he is still in the flesh working his way laboriously to the Kingdom of Heaven, the shadows of imperfect fear will sometimes encroach on his pathway, but if he rightly uses the Sevenfold Gift of God, his filial fear will grow in splendour and increase in warmth as life advances.

It is a pity that in the cloister pusillanimous souls are occasionally found who bury the gift of holy fear, because their fear remains that of a moody, fretful, suspicious, doubting, capricious child who never looks into the father's eyes with perfect trust. Such Religious are ever raking up past miseries, although repeatedly assured by prudent guides that the Eternal Father has pardoned them, and wishes them to be filled with childlike trust. They lose sight of the Fatherhood of God in the persistent and despairing study of His justice, while the devils take advantage of that moody and one-sided view of the attributes of God to plunge them into the deep pit of servile fear, in which they regard God as an inexorable Judge. As in this there is a considerable element of self-conceit, there is absolutely no chance of a cure for such souls apart from blind obedience to their spiritual guides. It is one of the worst forms of darkness that beset the soul on its way to God, and there must be no parley with it. Far from brooding over their past failings, those who are thus tempted must be up and doing—*exercising* the gifts of the Holy Spirit, especially fortitude. Their hope, too, must be strengthened by exercise, for filial fear and hope perfect each other, and are remedies against the spirit of pride, which is really the source of such broodings. Let them remember that the Seven Gifts of the Spirit are certain habitual perfections of the soul's powers, whereby these latter are rendered docile to the movements of the Holy Ghost: but that the powers of the soul will never become docile to these movements unless the gifts which are provided to accomplish His work in the soul are sought and used to the best advantage.

4. God gives holy fear that our reverence for Him may be so deepened as to make the very thought of sin abhorrent to us, regarding sin as the only real evil in the world. "The fear of the Lord driveth out sin" (*Ecclus.* i. 27). It leads us to hate and avoid the occasions of sin; deepens the consciousness of our frailty without rendering us pusillanimous; reminds us of past failures without lessening our hope; warns us of future dangers without

impairing our spirit of holy enterprise; induces us to guard the senses, to mortify the flesh, to bridle in the imagination, and to keep the affections of the heart first and last for God.

Holy fear, moreover, helps us to grieve over the sins of others, and leads us to make sacrifices for their conversion, out of very gratitude to God for His ineffable mercy and love in rescuing us from the pit of sin and making us His adoptive children. "*Father*" is the word most frequently found on the lips of those who understand the value of the gift of holy fear, for they know that if the idea of the Fatherhood of God be lost, the way is paved for distrust, dread, servile fear—nay! the forging once again of chains from which God in His mercy released them.

If there is one thing more than another conspicuous in the lives of the saints it is the horror with which they regarded sin. That horror was the result of the gift of holy fear. It led them to cleanse themselves of even their lesser failings by frequent confession. St. Leonard of Port Maurice, in this spirit of holy fear, confessed daily before Mass. So did St. Charles Borromeo and many others. It, moreover, led them to bear penances and humiliations as part of their debt due to the infinite justice of the Eternal Father, not grudgingly, but with a glad spirit.

Far from being satisfied with avoiding sin, those who have the holy fear of God are remarkable for their anxiety to use all their other gifts as well as possible, knowing that a rigorous account will one day be exacted. They husband their time, detest procrastination, welcome every opportunity of doing good, and dread being unready for the visit of the angel of death. In all things they try to edify, not to be seen by men, but out of reverence for the Father, who has placed neighbours by their side: thus holy fear in the spiritual life is like good-breeding in society, making for the comfort of all. If in the midst of the world holy fear makes a man unworldly, who can properly describe its effects in one who, by the grace of God, is called to the cloister? A Religious who is deeply influenced by the gift of holy fear is reverent, calm, patient with the shortcomings of others, severe towards himself (although never singular or extreme in his penances), and indulgent towards his neighbour. He is reticent yet genial, zealous but dignified, truly observant yet not meticulous. He seeks not difficult work, he fears presumption, but if it is imposed on him, his holy fear makes him dread refusing. He judges not, and he is unsuspicious. Remembering how long God waited for his own

whole-hearted service, he waits patiently for the return of the lost sheep, and never despairs of the conversion of the most hardened sinner. In one word he is Christlike, and presents to our admiring eyes, as far as mortal man can hope to do, a reflection of the holy fear of the Master. Let us, therefore, strive to grow in the holy fear of God, for the more we grow in it the wider will be our influence for good, and the less we shall fear with servile fear. This holy fear is the first effect of wisdom, and is, therefore, called the beginning of wisdom, for it makes a man submissive to God and obedient to His Holy Law.

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XX.

Da tuis fidelibus
In te confidentibus
Sacrum Septenarium.

(Give to Thy faithful, dearest Lord,
Whose only hope is Thy sure word,
The Seven Gifts of Thy Spirit.)

1. THE gift of filial fear helps us to understand what the Fatherhood of God means for the human soul, and paves the way for homage and adoration. The gift of piety aids in this great work, for it promotes holiness and all that holiness implies—viz., religion, devotion, reverence and love of God. As a gift of the Holy Ghost, piety is utterly at variance with lip service or serving as to the eye: "Not serving to the eye, as it were pleasing men, but, as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart" (*Eph.* vi. 6). In the midst of a cold and selfish world piety is a shining light, a reproach to those who sit in the darkness of mere human service or who are chained down to that most degraded of all slaveries—the slavery of sin. It is responsive to the invitation of Christ: "So let your light shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (*St. Matt.* v. 16). To the generality of mankind it is, perhaps, the most appealing of all the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Not all can follow flights of wisdom, or fathom the depths of understanding, or comprehend the secrets of counsel, or unravel the skein of knowledge, or appreciate filial fear; but even the untutored savage and the fierce barbarian tremble with emotion when before piety. In 452 Attila, "The Scourge of God," was impotent before Pope Leo, on whom had descended the gift of awe-inspiring piety, and in the year 455, Genseric, King of the Vandals, was similarly brought to a stand when on his devastating march.

In all ages piety has been powerful for good, not only for those gifted with it, but for all who came under their influence. It is the root of holiness; and holiness of life has ever been the thing most insisted on by the Creator, and when recognized, the most appreciated by men. "Sanctify yourselves, and be ye holy, because I am the Lord your God" (*Lev.* xx. 7). The saints of the Old

Law, like those of the New, walked before God and were perfect through the exercise of the gift of piety. In reading their lives the evidences of the other gifts illumine many of the pages, but every page bears witness to their piety. It was a lamp that they constantly trimmed, and that was ever filled with oil by the Holy Spirit; or it might be more aptly described as an atmosphere out of which life to them was inconceivable. Yet the saints, like ourselves, lived and moved in the world, and discharged duties similar to those which we pretend are obstacles to piety. We often vaguely await a time in which, freed from care, we hope to cultivate this gift of the Holy Ghost, forgetting that the gift is given to enable us to rise superior to care, and to be ever in the attitude of adoration before our Lord and God. The Religious who thus waits is like the Christian who may be said to pray only when he is in his Sunday clothes. Not so he who remembers his adoption by the Eternal Father, for the remembrance of his sonship at once excites his filial fear and his piety. "God sent His son that he might redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Therefore now he is not a servant but a son, and if a son an heir also through God" (*Gal.* iv. 4-7). St. Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, associates holiness of life with the gift of sonship: "That we should be holy and unspotted in his sight in charity" (*Eph.* i. 4), and St. John in his first Epistle, iii. 4, speaking of our sonship and of our future hopes, insists on the need of holiness: "And every one that hath this hope in him, sanctifieth himself, as he also is holy."

The Fathers of the Church call this adoption the deification of the creature. No wonder, then, that in order to live lives worthy of our dignity, we are so generously provided with sanctifying and actual grace, the theological and moral virtues, and the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. The excellence of the end for which we have been created and redeemed necessitates a generous provision of means to ensure it, and we should never tire of thanking God for the amplitude of His gifts—especially for the gifts of the Holy Spirit. They are, as we have said before, supernatural and permanent qualities, which make us attentive to the voice of God, susceptible to the movements of actual grace, lovers of the things of God, and consequently more docile to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost. Thus they lift us above the flesh and

enable us to walk by the Spirit: "For they that are according to the flesh, mind the things that are of the flesh; but they that are according to the Spirit, mind the things that are of the Spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death; but the wisdom of the Spirit is life and peace. Because the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God . . . but you are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (*Rom.* viii. 5-9).

2. We are now able to consider what piety is, and to note the results that should follow from its faithful exercise. It may be called devotion towards God as our *Father*, and it is exercised by all or by any of the acts that are the outcome of that filial devotion. As a special gift it (like the others) disposes us to follow the inspirations of the Holy Ghost beyond the measure suggested by mere reason. Mere human reason teaches the need of piety towards a father, and especially towards our Eternal Father; but the special gift of piety carries us much farther and higher, and expands, deepens, strengthens, and refines our powers beyond all merely human possibilities.

By the infusion of the virtues, man is more disposed to act of himself, but by the gifts he is more moved by the Holy Spirit; if he places no barrier in the way, but delivers himself up to the guidance of the Spirit and co-operates with every new impulse, there need be no limit to his spiritual progress. That progress ends in his own sanctification, and in his being used by God for the illumination of others on the one hand, and for the confusion of the world on the other: "For see your vocation, brethren, that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble: but the foolish things of the world hath God chosen that he may confound the wise: and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, that he may confound the strong: and the base things of the world and the things that are contemptible hath God chosen, and things that are not, that he might bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his sight" (1 *Cor.* i. 26-29).

To the soul gifted with piety the great mysteries of religion form food for daily reflection, so that even a long life proves far too short for their contemplation. The Unity and Trinity of God; the Incarnation and Redemption; the mission of the Holy Ghost; the Divine Perfections and their reflection in the lives of the saints; the place of the Blessed Virgin in the plan of Redemp-

tion ; the gifts and ministry of the angels and the sufferings and needs of the holy souls ; the development of Christian doctrine, the ever-adorable Mystery of the Altar, and the wonders of the sacramental system, are some of the themes that keep the man of piety in reverent wonder. His deep and holy thoughts affect even his exterior, and endow him with that indescribable charm which disarms the criticism even of the worldly-minded. Let us not imagine that such a man is too aloof to be concerned with ordinary affairs ; far from it! He knows that God's gifts are given to make His children alive to all His interests, and so he is deeply interested in all that concerns God's glory and in all that tends to the betterment of the human race. No one is wider than he in his sympathies, deeper in his charity, or less fastidious in his tastes ; nor does anyone excel him in love of country, or outrun him in the race of progress. He is dutiful in the use of his gifts and stern in deprecating their abuse ; but dutifulness in him is without self-interest, and sternness is devoid of harshness.

Piety endows a man with extraordinary discernment. He who has been long accustomed to seek the better things has first-hand knowledge of man's inherent littleness. His life has been spent in self-conquest, and he who conquers self knows well the varying stages between the first resolution to conquer and the long delayed victory. Thus it is that we read of pious confessors knowing all that was in the hearts of their penitents before their sins were confessed ; and thus it is, also, that according to the well-known adage, " the saints know each other."

Piety softens the heart, purifies the imagination, and unites with holy fear in bridling the senses and controlling the members of the body. It is ever active, yet never obtrusive or irritating, and is as different from garrulousness and self-manifestation as a deep and tranquil sea is different from a noisy, shallow brook. While it is incessant in its adoration, it is never boisterous or singular ; and although all-absorbing, it never interferes with the duties of one's state. It is unruffled, no matter how fierce the storms that may rage around one, or how prolonged the conflicts for faith and morals in which one may have to engage. It is raised above the conceits of men, and so does not change with the spiritual whims of the passing hour. It is evergreen in its freshness, and yet grows mellow with age, experience, and practice ; and is, therefore, entrancing and winning as all know who have had the privilege of living with the really pious. While piety

welcomes all lawful things as aids, it does not make the absence of those aids an excuse for abandoning the service of God—a truth that conveys a lesson for those who are pious only when some special friend is within reach, when a favourite confessor is at hand, or when work and place are quite in accordance with their wishes.

It is piety in the priest that softens the hearts of sinners, gives them confidence, and leads them repentant to his feet in the Confessional. The piety of Religious attracts subjects to the cloister, and proves more helpful to their perseverance than rules and regulations. Piety on the part of a child is a parent's best reward, whether that parent be one according to the flesh or the spirit; and in the outer world the piety of a child often acts as a magnet to draw back an erring parent from destruction. The eminently Christlike quality of piety is apparent when we consider that pity is a different form of the word. Where we find piety, pity cannot be far off: "Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep one's self unspotted from this world" (*St. Jas.* i. 27). "I have compassion on the multitude" (*St. Matt.* xv. 32). Looking on the widow of Naim, "being moved with mercy towards her, he said to her: Weep not" (*St. Luke* vii. 13). "And when he drew near, seeing the city, he wept over it" (*St. Luke* xix. 41). The identification of piety with pity in the Sacred Heart of Jesus was understood by those who stood near the grave of Lazarus: "And Jesus wept. The Jews, therefore, said: Behold how he loved him" (*St. John* xi. 35-36).

In the cloister the practice of piety is made easy by the daily Mass, the abiding presence of our Blessed Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar, the rule and constitutions, traditions and customs, and community exercises in general, and thus there is less need, at this moment, of positive instruction than of humble inquiry as to how we have used these privileges since last Retreat. Has our piety been fitful—dependent rather on sentiment than on childlike faith in the Fatherhood of God? Have we allowed the tributaries of the stream of piety to run dry by neglect of spiritual reading, meditation, the "visit," or by silent contempt for the Sacramentals of the Church? Have we, by our eccentricities, made piety appear ridiculous, or by our criticism prevented piety in others? Have we, through cowardice and human respect been

deaf to the inner call to piety; or when conscious of the possession of the gift, have we been vainglorious and so failed to co-operate with it? Have we not secretly feared to receive the gift of piety, lest more should be expected from us than we were prepared to give? Have we, on the one hand, exaggerated the outward signs of piety, or, on the other, affected an irreverent exterior through fear of the gibes of the tepid?

3. As piety is one of the three gifts given for the strengthening of the will, it follows that neglect to exercise it will end in the weakening of the spiritual man. It will matter little if the intellect, aided by the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, and knowledge, illumines the will, if the latter is not in turn strengthened from within by the exercise of the gifts specially assigned to it—viz., filial fear, piety, and fortitude. These must be united in the good work, if the favoured child of God is to reap his reward. Fortitude as a gift of the Holy Ghost supports the soul with courage and patience in the fulfilment of the duties required of it in its progress through life. It lends dignity to filial fear, and preserves it from lapsing into servility, cowardice, or timidity; it supports weak human nature in persevering in piety, when faced with obstacles that rise within and without, by self-imposed mortifications and resolute watchfulness over the avenues of the soul. As one of the cardinal virtues, fortitude may be described as courage, but as a gift of the Holy Ghost its equivalent is patience: "In your patience you shall possess your souls" (*St. Luke* xxi. 19).

The need of fortitude has been made clear in our previous meditations. We have dwelt on the trials that await all true soldiers of Christ, and which cannot be overcome without help from above. Apart from trials from without, the weakness that overtakes human nature with the passing years, threatening in so many cases even physical collapse, shows the need of the gift of fortitude, for without it perseverance to the end would be impossible. The gift is likewise needed to excite the lax to mortification and penance, or at least to bear patiently the yoke put on them by Almighty God, for it is generally admitted that the spirit of mortification, even in the cloister, has fallen on evil days. Nowadays a superior scarcely dares to ask his subjects to observe the ordinary mortifications of the rule without exposing himself to the charge of parsimony, and his conscience is frequently burdened

with fears regarding the sufficiency of the grounds on which dispensations are asked. Fortitude is needed also for perseverance in works trying to flesh and blood imposed by holy obedience; and thus it is that no gift of God is more frequently held up to us for our encouragement in difficulties. The daily Mass, in which the fortitude of Christ is commemorated, is an abiding call to follow in His steps; the very mention of a martyr's name is a reproach to all who sluggishly follow the easy road rather than the one that ends in Calvary. In all ages there was room for inquiry, but in these days especially, when the spirit of ease is so prevalent, it is well for us to examine whether our lives bear witness to the existence of fortitude within us. Are we too solicitous about our health, querulous under real or imaginary privations, cowardly in resisting temptations, slothful in our work, peevish under contradictions, self-indulgent? If so, we should be ashamed of our abuse of the gift which the Holy Spirit has given for the ennobling of our nature and the formation of the martyr-spirit, remembering that we have not yet resisted unto blood, and that we who wear the uniform of the Crucified should be more filled with His Spirit. Let us with great fervour ask the Holy Ghost not to turn from us in anger, but to bless us with the fulness of the gift of fortitude, so that with St. Paul we may be able to say: "I can do all things in him who strengtheneth me" (*Phil.* iv. 13). Mary, Queen of Martyrs, come to our assistance! O all ye Holy Martyrs, pray for us!

XXI.

Da tuis fidelibus
In te confidentibus
Sacrum Septenarium.

(Grant to Thy faithful, dearest Lord,
Whose only hope is Thy sure word,
The Seven Gifts of Thy Spirit.)

1. IN the course of our Retreat we have seen the need of using all our faculties well, as becomes dutiful servants of God. The cloister is a vineyard in which we have been placed to labour for the Divine Master, and the task allotted to us excels that of others, inasmuch as it is done primarily for His greater honour and glory. Even when that work is menial it is redeemed from sordidness because of our self-surrender as Religious. It is regrettable that in the outside world men do not generally put the glory of God in the first place, for to this all rational creatures are called; but there can be no excuse for forgetfulness on the part of a Religious; the very habit he wears is a constant reminder of his obligation to put God first and last in all his works. The sacred emblems found everywhere in religious houses are silent monitors, reminding the inmates that our Blessed Lord was in labours from His youth, that Mary was the handmaid of the Lord, that St. Francis and the other saints were ever saying: "Brethren, let us now begin, for hitherto we have done nothing."

Not only have we dwelt on our obligation to use all our faculties to the utmost in God's service, on behalf of our neighbour and for our own sanctification, but we have considered the means by which those faculties are to be developed and elevated, and have concluded that man is inexcusable if he falters on the way, or fancies that God expects more from him than he can give. At *all* times the Creator gave to His creatures sufficient grace for their salvation and sanctification, but in these latter days He is prodigally generous in His gifts to men.

In deploring the failures of men in general, we have found that they arose, not from the insufficiency of Divine aid, but from the perversity of men in refusing to make use of it. So true is this that the history of the world could be written in two chapters;

the first chapter giving the life-story of those who used the gifts of God to their advantage, and the second recording the lives of those who abused or ignored those gifts. What is true of the world is likewise true of individuals. The saint is one who uses God's gifts well; the sinner is one who abuses them. This was the burden of the reproaches of the prophets of old; it was this which gave point to St. Paul's words in his Epistle to the Romans, that moved St. Augustine in writing the *City of God*, that led to the denunciations of St. Bernard, that inflamed the eloquence of St. Dominic, inspired the enthusiasm of St. Francis of Assisi, kindled the zeal of St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier, and roused the ardour of St. Philip Neri, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Alphonsus, St. Paul of the Cross and the Venerable Don Bosco. The saints of God were grieved to see that, while the Creator was ever showering down heavenly gifts and seeking the love of His creatures, the majority of men contented themselves with natural gifts, and gave their allegiance to merely human philosophers. God has always sought to make man a sharer in His Divine perfections, to deify him; but man has ever been fleeing from His presence and hiding from Him as a senseless scholar flees from a generous master, whose one wish is to make him proficient.

In nothing, perhaps, has this been more evident than in connection with the gift of knowledge. In the search for knowledge men have contented themselves with the dim lights provided by human ingenuity, forgetful of the sun of supernatural knowledge which was shining overhead to illumine their pathway. Instead of disposing themselves to receive the gift of knowledge for the better understanding of the work of Creation, the marvels of Divine Providence, and the other attributes of God, they have entangled themselves in a multitude of questions, in scientific wranglings, in changing hypotheses, in erroneous deductions, while the little ones in the Church of God have become giants in knowledge, because they sat as meek disciples at the feet of God, whose Spirit is the Spirit of Knowledge and Wisdom.

This is the sin of the world even to the present day—viz., to live and act as if the totality of knowledge consisted in finding out the origin, composition, age, motion and destiny of the universe as a mere material entity, irrespective of the claims of God its Creator. Is it not scandalous that so many men use their undoubtedly great talents in the sympathetic discussion of

questions raised by God's enemies, rather than in the submission of their reason to the dominion of supernatural faith? Leaving out of reckoning the millions still in the darkness of Paganism, is it not deplorable to think that millions in Christian lands are groping in the shadows of heresy, schism, atheism, agnosticism, theosophy, and spiritism? And yet if we dared upbraid them for their ignorance they would regard us as bigots and as ignoble heirs of the Dark Ages. According to human standards knowledge is either all-sufficing in itself or useful only as a means of social betterment, whereas, to the practical Christian, knowledge is of value only inasmuch as it uses the light obtained from created things to illumine the pathway to the source of all knowledge—God—and to enable us to grow in His love. To the Christian, knowledge, apart from its connection with everlasting life, to which it should point the way, is a delusion and a snare, puffing up and blinding one to his destiny. Was not this the mind of St. Paul when he wrote: "I count all things to be but loss for the excellent knowledge of Jesus Christ, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but as dung, that I may gain Christ" (*Phil.* iii. 8)? Infinitely more emphatic are the Master's words: "For what shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (*St. Mark* viii. 36, 37).

Knowledge which stops short at the contemplation of the material universe, which lifts a man to the pinnacle of worldly power and leaves him there, which undervalues the worth of the human soul, is not gain, but everlasting loss. It is written: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (*Ps.* cxxvi. 1); so also unless the Lord enlightens, the light that comes from other sources will but render the darkness of the mind more profound. "Come ye to him and be enlightened; and your faces shall not be confounded" (*Ps.* xxxiii. 6).

2. No indictment can ever surpass in severity that of St. Paul. In his Epistle to the Romans he inveighs against the insolence of those who exalted human knowledge at the expense of that which is Divine: "And as they liked not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient: being filled with all iniquity, malice, fornication, avarice, wickedness, full of envy, murder,

contention, deceit, malignity, whisperers, . . . who, having known the justice of God, did not understand that they who do such things are worthy of death" (*Rom.* i. 28-32).

Even for the Religious there is danger of knowledge puffing him up, unless he is constantly mindful that the gift of knowledge is given to purify his speculations and to ennoble his religious practices. The deeper his study of material things and the greater the success of his work, the greater the need of such self-examination as will make him conscious of his nothingness and of the danger he runs of lapsing into sin, unless he fears God, unless he prays, unless he girds himself with fortitude through self-discipline. Mindful of the degradation of the world, notwithstanding its intellectual achievements and its boasted civilization, he will say to himself: "I also could easily descend to that degraded level, if I forgot, even for an hour, that all knowledge is vain unless it leads one to avoid evil and to form a right judgment as to what should be believed or discredited, as to what line of conduct should be followed or avoided." It is for these ends that the gift of knowledge is given by the Holy Ghost—to bring our intelligence into harmony with the mind of God and to subject ourselves to His Divine will. Worldlings deprive themselves of this gift, and hence stagger on in their blindness and spiritual ignorance to the verge of perdition.

With regard to the ways in which the gift of knowledge is lost, it may be said in general that when passion is uncontrolled the gift is driven out of the soul; and contrariwise, when prayer, study, meditation, duty, and mortification have their proper place in the life of man, the gift of knowledge increases beyond our expectations. "He conducted the just through right ways, and gave him the knowledge of holy things" (*Wisd.* x. 10). This can be witnessed by all who have eyes to see. Little children, illiterates, those who in the eyes of the world are fools, find the pathway of duty with perfect ease and follow it with constancy; but the proud, the carnal, the obstinate, the "learned" and the "experienced," walk in darkness. "Because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will reject thee" (*Osee* iv. 6). "If thy eye be single thy whole body shall be lightsome, but if thy eye be evil thy whole body shall be darksome" (*St. Matt.* vi. 22, 23). "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness" (*St. John* viii. 12). "The fool walketh in darkness" (*Eccles.* ii. 14). He who is the happy possessor of the gift of knowledge is one of the chosen ones

referred to by Christ when He said: "I know mine and mine know me" (*St. John* x. 14).

Let us pray for the fulness of this gift and prove our sincerity by seeing things in their proper perspective—a thing, alas! not always done by Religious, for in these busy days spiritual affairs are often driven into the background, though they should always be kept to the front. No matter how pressing our secular duties, or how urgent the need of growing in knowledge with a view to successful preaching or teaching, there can be no blessing on our work unless the search for spiritual knowledge comes first in our programme. We should, therefore, resolve to apply the gift of knowledge first of all to matters purely spiritual—the deepening of our spirit of prayer and contemplation, the study of Holy Scripture and Christian doctrine, the acquisition of virtue—strongly convinced that our growth in secular knowledge will not suffer, for God, who is the source of all knowledge, will perfect His gift in us in proportion to the fervour with which we use it primarily for His greater honour and glory.

3. We Religious should greatly esteem the Gift of Counsel, for through it we have been led to our holy state of life. That we had the courage to follow the three Evangelical Counsels by pronouncing our vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, was because the Holy Ghost operated in us in a manner which, to the worldly-minded, seemed contrary to the laws of prudence. Indeed, the charge levelled at the aspirant to the religious life not only by worldlings, but sometimes by members of his own household, is that it is imprudent for a youth full of animal spirits to vow perpetual chastity, for one of strong will to vow obedience, and for one capable of making a name for himself in the world to vow poverty. Thus it is that the great surrender made to God in embracing the religious life is the key to what seems mysterious in the Gift of Counsel—the way of Counsel often appears opposed to prudence. Seeing that both are the gifts of God, there can be no antagonism: on the contrary, spiritual writers agree in saying that Counsel is the perfection of Prudence, for he who is led by the Spirit of Counsel considers that his prudence is best shown by throwing himself unreservedly into the arms of Almighty God: "Be you humbled, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in the time of visitation: *casting all your care upon him, for he hath care of you*" (1 *St. Pet.* v. 6, 7). He

cries: "Show, O Lord, Thy ways to me, and teach me Thy paths" (*Ps.* xxiv. 4), trusting to the promises of His Heavenly Father: "Counsel shall keep thee, and prudence shall preserve thee" (*Prov.* ii. 11). On the part of the creature the Gift of Counsel points to much deeper trust in Almighty God than is shown by the Cardinal virtue of Prudence, and on the part of the Creator it means the crowning of that virtue by a superior gift.

By the Gift of Counsel God moves His elect to deeds that seem beyond human power, and sustains them as long as their trust in Him continues. Historical pages are crowded with examples of the efficacy of this gift when it is loyally used, and of the perversion of man's heart when he disregards it. The Sapiential Books of Holy Scripture and the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church; the Rules of Religious Orders and the revelations of the Saints; the abandon with which the Saints overstepped the bounds of prudence by kissing the wounds of the leprous: these are some results of the Gift of Counsel. As writers or preachers, as martyrs or confessors, as contemplatives, or as men and women living in the world, the Saints, one and all, were led by the Spirit of Counsel; and hence, what the world chose to call imprudences were really acts of the highest wisdom inspired by the Holy Ghost. On the other hand, wherever we find the record of a fall, we are safe in saying there was a departure from the way of Counsel; the victim grew tired of corresponding with the gift, fearing that it was leading him too far from places that were pleasant, or from persons that were loved more than God: prudence of the flesh ended in his destruction.

That Religious co-operates with the gift of Counsel who is faithful in little things, who never grows too old to learn even from the very young, nor too attached to his own opinion to listen to hints or advice from others, for he knows that the Spirit of God makes use of all His creations to convey to us His counsels. "Out of the mouth of infants and of sucklings thou hast perfected praise" (*Ps.* viii. 3). When one claims to have more than ordinary light, or when such is imputed to him, the test is to be found in his attitude towards his Creator in the ordinary affairs of life. If he is faithful to duty, humble, and prayerful, there is every reason to believe that the light is from the Spirit of Counsel; but if, on the contrary, he is a law to himself, the light is, to say the least, doubtful; and if a pretended counsel is clearly contradictory

to the Divine Law or to the teachings of our Holy Mother the Church, it cannot be from God, who is Truth itself.

These considerations raise a question which occasionally disturbs well-meaning Religious—viz., whether they are not called by God to a severer institute or to one in which there would be a wider or more congenial field for the exercise of their talents. Seeing that Holy Church recognizes degrees of severity in the Orders approved by her, and that she, for good reasons, sanctions a transfer from a less severe Order to one more severe in its discipline, the question cannot be lightly dismissed. In attempting an answer we must, in the first place, assume that when vows were made, the soul was guided by the Spirit of Counsel, and that, short of a very special light, there can be no question of a change even to a higher institute; for as the devil can transform himself into an angel of light for the unsettlement of souls dedicated to the service of God, we must, in the words of St. John, "try every spirit."

When, therefore, a Religious is tempted to seek a severer institute, or one different from that in which he has made his vows, he should frankly ask himself whether he can conscientiously say that he has done his best in the institute to which God clearly called him. If he humbles himself and searches his soul, he will probably find that far from having availed himself of the means of sanctification provided by his institute, he has in many ways been imperfect, and has blamed his environment for failures that are purely subjective. The inference is that if he undertook heavier responsibilities he would fail altogether. Even should a Religious find no flaws in his observance, he would not be warranted in seeking a change unless the suggestion came from approved superiors, for the Holy Ghost, it may reasonably be assumed, wishes him to leaven (by his perseverance in exact observance) the institute to which he has been called. There would be no stability in the religious life if everyone who proved dutiful wished to transfer himself to another Order, or sought permission to start a "reform." Let him prove that he is led by the Spirit of Counsel in continuing to perfect himself on the lines laid down by the holy rule which he has professed, being assured that great sanctity can be attained, with the grace of God, in *any* of the Orders approved by the Church.

The idea conveyed by the Gift of Counsel is opposed to fickleness, impulsiveness, self-assurance, and restlessness. Counsel is

suggestive of a calm, reposeful, watchful, humble, and reverent posture at the feet of the Most High; and once a vocation is vouchsafed by the Almighty God, there should be no thought of a change on the part of the subject. It is always safe to drive away such a thought as a dangerous temptation. *Should* the Spirit of Counsel wish His child to be transferred to other pastures, He Himself will provide in such ways as to leave no room to doubt His Divine intervention; but that intervention must be interpreted by our Holy Mother the Church, and by approved superiors rather than by the Religious himself, for no one can be a safe judge in his own case. Impatience with a decision contrary to one's own wishes would be an absolutely clear proof that a religious was led, not by the Spirit of Counsel, but by self-will.

Let us, then, in all our deliberations, fear to force the hand of God, lest He should allow us to walk to our destruction in the darkness of our own conceits. Let us invoke Him especially in all onerous undertakings, and lend an attentive ear to the counsels that reach us through our Holy Mother the Church, our superiors, and our confessors. If we are truly led by the Spirit of Counsel, every duty we are called to will be a cause of light, because God's gift is given that every duty may be well done for the glory of His Name and for our own everlasting reward. O Mary, Mother of Good Counsel, pray for us that we may be blessed with the perfection of the Gift. Amen.

XXII.

Da tuis fidelibus
In te confidentibus
Sacrum Septenarium.

(Give to Thy faithful, dearest Lord,
Whose only hope is Thy sure word,
The Seven Gifts of Thy Spirit.)

1. IF we said that some men are content to vegetate and show no outward sign of understanding we could not be charged with uncharitableness, for the saying is, in one form or other, expressed in every civilized language. The men of whom we speak use their senses in such sluggish ways that no message is conveyed to the mind, and thus the mind remains for years—perhaps for a lifetime—vacant. True, it exists, but its existence has no more effect in shaping those men's lives, or in influencing the minds of others, than the grass of the field. In those cases, the only exception to the rule is found when sensual appetites are strongly roused, for then the whole man is inflamed, just as a forest is set on fire through the ignition of scrub and brushwood. These are the men who swell the ranks when mob-law reigns, or when tyrants, in alienating the sympathies of thoughtful and righteous men, by that very act draw to their side the scum of society—*i.e.*, men who do not think.

In reconsidering some of the historical episodes referred to in our Retreat, we can well imagine that it was men of that stamp who hounded down Moses and the prophets, murmured in the journey through the desert, crowded under the balcony when Barabbas was preferred to Jesus, filled the Coliseum in Rome during the general persecutions, and thirsted for blood at the foot of the scaffold in subsequent persecutions of the Church.

Under normal conditions, the men of whom we speak go round the world without gathering a single new idea, and live till old age without contributing anything to the common good. In the words of the Psalmist, they are "like the horse and the mule that have no understanding" (*Ps.* xxxi. 9). Hidden processes to them remain hidden to the end, for they have no questions to put and no difficulties to solve. They are too indolent to explore, too proud or too stolid to inquire, or, again, are so steeped in sensuality that

the powers of the soul are roused only when appetites crave for satisfaction.

There are others in the world who are never satisfied until, through the exercise of their faculties, they know all that can be known—humanly speaking—about things in which they are interested; in the words of the poet, nothing that interests mankind in general is void of interest for them. Not content with personal research, they avail themselves of the labours of others by reading and reflecting; they consult the learned, and believe they do themselves honour by seeking information even from the lowly and the young. They tap all the sources of knowledge to which they have access, often at the cost of long and tedious journeys, and at the risk of life and limb; and yet, no matter how much they strive, they are compelled at length to say that they can go no farther, nor soar higher, nor probe more deeply with the limited powers at their command; and they are driven to the conclusion that there is more in Heaven and on earth than is dreamt of in any human system.

Such men, if void of faith, flatter themselves that sooner or later the accumulated wisdom of the world will solve all that is now mysterious, just as we who live in the twentieth century have solved problems that baffled men in the Middle Ages, forgetting that, as human nature is limited, human research is, and always must be, likewise limited. Those gifted with faith, who are as keen as their neighbours in scientific research, humbly confess that, even should all the secrets of nature be disclosed before the end of time, man would still have to stand as an abject inquirer at the gate of the Infinite, which swings open only in God's own time and in God's own measure for the disclosure of supernatural mysteries, which are beyond the scope of man's merely natural powers. The humanitarian says that he has relationship only with humanity: the Christian avows that if he seeks not relationship with God in all that he does, he will be like a ship out of its course, destined only to be wrecked.

We are thus confronted with two classes of men who, instead of vegetating, *do* use their understanding: the one class composed of the self-satisfied who actually or virtually profess to be on the way to the unravelling of all that is mysterious, and the other made up of those who, although equally well equipped by nature, yet humbly confess that finite as men are, they can never hope to exhaust the Infinite. In making this admission they do not

underrate the power of the understanding, nor do they cease to exercise it; but, on the contrary, they humbly ask God to develop it by granting them the gift of the Holy Spirit. To obtain the gift, they strive to keep in the grace of God, knowing that God dispenses His supernatural favours only to those who dispose themselves for their reception by the rectitude of their lives. God makes His sun to shine on the bad as well as on the good, but the gifts of His Spirit are only for the fire-tried—for those who humble themselves by walking in fear, in piety, and in Christian fortitude, and who school themselves in Divine knowledge and counsel.

These are truths from which there is no escape, for even in our own limited experience we must have met highly gifted scientific men (or read their works, or heard their lectures) who were profoundly stupid in matters that are easily grasped by those who live by faith and are blessed with the gifts of the Holy Ghost. Every convert to the Church from the ranks of agnosticism confesses that when he trusted only to his human understanding, unaided by the gift of God, he was perfectly dense with regard to elementary Christian truths. The absolute truthfulness of this confession is proved by numberless examples in history. Is not the obstinacy of the Jews a proof of how the understanding of an otherwise keen race can be blinded? And what of the "Reformed" sects, who, with the example of the splendid vitality of the Church before their eyes, pretend that she is dead? Human nature being corrupt, the result could not be otherwise; and when to the corruption of human nature are added the perversions of truth, the antagonism to authority, the hatred of self-discipline, that have existed especially from the time of the Reformation, the denseness of the human understanding with regard to spiritual things is easily explained.

How necessary, then, it is for us—still wayfarers amongst those who know not God—to be blessed with the Gift of Understanding, lest we also should, in our blindness, think ourselves self-sufficient, and so estrange ourselves from the true followers of Christ.

2. Although the natural understanding, when duly exercised, enables men to attain to great eminence in art and science, it cannot of itself carry them very far into the domain of the supernatural, and hence it happens that those who loudly assert their independence of authority, their ignorance of God, their contempt of the supernatural, and their determination to be a law to them-

selves, have really less understanding than a Catholic child or a poor, ignorant labourer who is in the grace of God. An illiterate who is in the grace of God has a sturdy conviction that God is Omnipotent, that Truth is Eternal, that man—far from being a law to himself—is dependent on Eternal Laws by which he will be judged, and is also dependent on such authority as is sanctioned by Almighty God. He is also convinced that God has provided for the preservation of His children in the New Law by setting up an Infallible Church, out of which there is no salvation, even as He set up the Ark of the Covenant to be a rallying-point for His chosen people of the Old Covenant. The "intellectuals" may dispute these facts, but their words are merely empty sounds, which are not the result of right understanding. Right understanding cannot be in opposition to revealed truth; and when great crises come in the world's history such men are lost in the seething crowds that we spoke of in the beginning of this meditation. Their human reasonings do not lift them out of the ranks of those who do not reason at all, and thus they make common cause with the mob. This statement would be scarcely credible but for the revelations of the French Revolution, in which we find the intellectuals mingling freely with those whose intelligence was scarcely higher than that of the horse and the mule: "Do not become like the horse and the mule that have no understanding" (*Ps.* xxxi. 9). Contemporary history proves this beyond contradiction. The "intellectuals," who exhaust themselves in the interests of cheap divorce, secular education, and spiritism, find kindred spirits chiefly amongst the degraded, for, when Faith is unknown or discarded, the barriers between culture and licence are merely nominal. Human understanding left to itself cannot long save man from his animal instincts. Speaking of such men in his own time, St. John says: "Even now there are become many anti-Christs," and then, addressing the true followers of Christ, he continues: "And as for you, let the unction which you have received from him abide in you. And you have no need that any man teach you: but as his unction teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and as it hath taught you, abide in him" (1 *St. John* ii. 18 . . . 27).

The quickening of the understanding that comes with faith is aided by the Gift of Understanding. It is given by the Holy Ghost to enable us to relish more and more Divine truth, and to see more clearly its reasonableness, its force, its solace, and its rewards. He

who has this gift may not have the natural ability to give such an exposition of his faith as would satisfy a relentless critic, but, as spiritual writers say, he has an experimental affection and relish of Divine things, through the union of his mind with God, that is not possessed by those to whom the gift is denied. To such a soul the motives of holy faith become luminous, and God is no longer regarded as One who dwells remotely in Heaven. He is felt to be accessible, and to be ever near. "Blessed is the man whom thou shalt instruct, O Lord; and shall teach him out of thy law" (*Ps.* xciii. 12). "The uncertain and hidden things of thy wisdom thou hast made manifest to me" (*Ps.* l. 8).

From what has been said of the benefits of the Gift of Understanding in general, the Religious can gather how much this gift means for him in his life of obedience and mortification. It enables him to penetrate and to sympathize with the motives of superiors and to discover and appreciate the real good that is in his brethren. While others roundly carp and criticize flaws either in motives or in character, he judiciously distinguishes between merely technical faults and those which are blamable; and he leans always to the more charitable side, for right understanding is ever exceedingly slow in condemning. This gift should be earnestly sought by all, especially by confessors and by those in authority. Pray therefore with Solomon: "Give to thy servant an understanding heart, to judge thy people, and discern between good and evil. And the word was pleasing to the Lord, that Solomon had asked such a thing" (3 *Kings* iii. 9-10). "Give me understanding, and I will teach thy law; and I will keep it with my whole heart" (*Ps.* cxviii. 3, 4). Who can doubt but that the Holy Ghost will respond: "I will give thee understanding, and I will instruct thee in this way, in which thou shalt go: I will fix my eyes upon thee" (*Ps.* xxxi. 8)?

3. Wisdom is the crowning gift of the Holy Ghost; without it there would be a sense of incompleteness in the spiritual man. It is Wisdom which, so to speak, marshals the other gifts in their proper order, and gives to each its due proportion in the building up of a perfect whole. The opposite to Wisdom is Folly; but between the two extremes there are many degrees of imperfection. Even when a soul is possessed of the other gifts, there might be such lack of proportion as would make the gifts themselves appear ridiculous.

Who has not heard of the "pious fool"—*i.e.*, of the man whose piety outruns his discretion, and makes him incapable of holding any responsible position or performing even ordinary duties? Nor can anyone be ignorant of the fact that fear is often so abused as to make a Religious, instead of being a help to his Community and the Church, a burden to the one and a scandal to the other. Why? He is obstinate, timid, or scrupulous. Fortitude itself may be used in such a way as to endanger the spirit of discipline—*i.e.*, if one's passivity under deliberate and malicious breaches of discipline paves the way for grievous disorders. In this way superiors especially might be more patient of abuses than becomes their office, flattering themselves that their self-control gives proof of passive fortitude (in which the Gift of Fortitude consists), whereas its real source is cowardice—the absence of the gift. Knowledge, Counsel, and Understanding might easily lead one favoured with these gifts to be too self-conscious of his power, too prone to discredit the good qualities of others—in one word, too arrogant.

When, however, the Gift of Wisdom is granted in generous measure to a suppliant soul; when it is received with gratitude, nourished with that filial fear which is its very beginning, and kept alive all through life by an ever-deepening spirit of humility and prayer, then the other gifts of God are duly controlled and made helpful in the building up of a perfect spiritual man, for Wisdom is given by the Holy Spirit to control man with all that is in him: "She reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly" (*Wisd.* viii. 1). "And who shall know thy thought, except thou give wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above: and so the ways of them that are upon earth may be corrected and men may learn the things that please thee? For by wisdom they were healed, whosoever have pleased thee, O Lord, from the beginning" (*Wisd.* ix. 17-19).

The Gift of Wisdom enables the soul to see more deeply into supernatural things, not by experiences appealing to the senses, but by their highest causes or through the mysteries in which they are contained—viz., the attributes of God and the mysteries of the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation and the Real Presence, to mention but a few. Wisdom guides the soul to the contemplation of God Himself in His attributes, and from the reverent study of His Divine perfections the soul descends to the knowledge of His works: "For she is a vapour of the power of God, and a certain pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty God:

and therefore no defiled thing cometh unto her. For she is the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness. . . . For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with wisdom" (*Wisd.* vii. 25-28). "It is she that teacheth the knowledge of God, and is the chooser of his works" (*Wisd.* viii. 4).

From this can be understood the high control exercised by the Gift of Wisdom over all the powers of the soul and body, and how Wisdom may even supply the lack of natural gifts.

Wisdom may exist without great knowledge or experience, but knowledge and experience may prove curses if unaccompanied by wisdom: "Wisdom opened the mouth of the dumb, and made the tongues of infants eloquent" (*Wisd.* x. 21). Perhaps the most noted example in modern times of wisdom in association with youth and inexperience is that of The Little Flower of Jesus.

The greater the gift, the more urgent the need of so living as to foster its growth in the soul. The sad example of Solomon is meant as a warning for all generations: "The Lord is found by them that tempt him not: and he showeth himself to them that have faith in him. Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sin. The Holy Spirit of discipline will flee from the deceitful" (*Wisd.* i. 2-5).

> Knowledge is proud that he has learned so much;
> Wisdom is humble that he knows no more.
>
> *The Task*, vi. 88.

He who is led by the Spirit of Wisdom possesses his soul in peace, and is endowed with power to spread peace abroad, no gift being more adapted to win men over from a contentious to a rational frame of mind: "The wisdom of the Spirit is life and peace" (*Rom.* viii. 6). This alone should be an inducement to Religious to pray for the increase of the gift, so that their home may be worthy of the Prince of Peace, who dwells in their midst.

In bringing these reflections on the gifts of the Holy Ghost to an end, we cannot do better than make the following prayer our own. It was the daily prayer of Cardinal H. E. Manning, from 1840 until his death:

"O God the Holy Ghost, Whom I have slighted, grieved, resisted from my childhood to this day, reveal unto me Thy Personality, Thy Presence, Thy Power. Make me to be of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord. O Thou that art the

Spirit of the Father and the Son. O Thou that art the Love of the Father and the Son. O Thou that baptizest with fire. Shed abroad in my heart the fire of Thy love, set me all on fire with the love of my God. Pour upon me one drop of that holy flame, one drop of that heavenly fire that I may be altogether consumed as a sacrifice acceptable to Thee. O Thou that hast commanded me to love Thee with all my heart, kindle me with zeal, melt me with sorrow, that I may live the life and die the death of a perfect penitent. Let that holy flame burn up and consume in me all that is contrary to Thy love, that I may love Thee with all my soul and all my strength, and my neighbour as myself." (Written in the Notes of Retreat made in preparation for his work as Archbishop of Westminster, June, 1865, at the Passionist Retreat, Highgate, London.)

XXIII.—DA VIRTUTIS MERITUM

(Grant us in life Thy helping Grace.)

1. AS we have already meditated on the nature, source, necessity, and value of grace, we may now proceed to consider prayer, which is the ordinary means of obtaining it. We call it the *ordinary* means of obtaining grace, because it is always in our power to pray, whereas it is not always possible to receive the Sacraments, or to avail ourselves of other means of obtaining grace—*e.g.*, by fasting and abstinence.

In approaching this important subject we cannot do better than picture to ourselves our Lord's indignation when, in entering the temple, He found it used for profane purposes: "And he taught, saying to them, 'Is it not written, My house shall be called the house of prayer to all the nations? But you have made it a den of thieves'" (*St. Mark* xi. 17). The cloister, in the designs of God, is essentially a House of Prayer, towards which the steps of His chosen ones, in all ages and in all nations, have been directed by His Holy Spirit; and this is so well recognized even by the enemies of the Church that a departure from the spirit of prayer is ever regarded as a blot on the fair name of monasticism. When in the hey-day of persecution monasteries were raided, the sacrilege was cloaked under the pretext that the work for which they were instituted was no longer performed—the iconoclasts pretended that prayer and praise had succumbed to laxity and disorder. In the majority of cases it was a lying pretext; but the fact that it was urged at all shows us that even the world recognizes the cloister as a House of Prayer.

We who are vowed to the special service of Almighty God to keep watch and guard over the Blessed Sacrament, who are pledged to do penance for our own sins and to make reparation for the sins of the world, and who are committed by our profession to tend to the perfection of our state, cannot harbour any doubt but that, first and last, and all the time, the cloister is indeed a House of Prayer—set up by Almighty God side by side with His Infallible Church as a landmark in the desert of the world to save and sanctify those who seek its shelter, and to refresh the eyes and sustain the hopes of those who only see it from afar. Should it ever fail in this sublime purpose, then, although the cloister might

not, in the words of Holy Scripture, become a den of thieves, it would nevertheless only cumber the ground.

The cloister, to speak in a general manner, being a House of Prayer, it follows that the difference between a House of Contemplation and one in which the "Mixed" Life is led is only one of degree, and that prayer must be the very soul of the latter as of the former. Therefore, let not those who lead the mixed life imagine that they may treat prayer lightly, as if it were intended only to season their secular activities; for no matter how absorbing those activities may be, they must be entirely subordinated to the *primary* duty of all Religious—viz., the duty of prayer. It is all the more necessary to insist on this, for alas! there is an indefinite but none the less mischievous spirit abroad in religious circles, that so long as one's work is good and is done for the glory of God and the benefit of the institute, it does not matter much if prayer is curtailed or left to take its chance amidst the multitude of secular affairs, in which even contemplatives nowadays have to engage for the earning of their daily bread. True, the above feeling is due less to laxity on the part of Religious than to the nature of the times in which we live. In days that are not very remote, when dowries were larger and benefactors more generous, the religious life was unaccompanied by anxiety, and thus the life of prayer was less distracted; but although circumstances have changed, we must not allow them to influence us to such an extent as to endanger the foundations of our institute; nor can it be too often repeated that the very bedrock of the religious state is *Holy Prayer*. If the spirit of prayer is lost, a convent or monastery may still stand, but it will be merely a huge whited sepulchre, full of disorder. It will be no excuse before God to say that it does good educational work, that it runs a successful laundry, that its members have obtained university degrees; for these results should be merely incidental to its life. But if they are regarded as the *essentials* of the cloister life, they are but witnesses to the loss of the religious spirit, and proofs that earnest souls who entered the cloister to develop their spirit of prayer have been deceived. In many cases these aberrations are responsible for the restlessness (referred to in a previous meditation) of well-meaning Religious who crave for better observance.

2. In most cases the call to the cloister is accompanied by an ardent wish to pray more and to pray better than one did in the

past, and the first thing that strikes the beginner is that the time allotted to prayer seems insufficient for his spiritual needs. This is an error of judgment which is rectified in due course of time, but it is worthy of note as showing the trend of the mind and heart called by God to His service. The Church, in approving Religious Institutes, assures itself that the time allotted to prayer by the Rule is ample. Failure to grasp this is due to the fact that the beginner formerly prayed according to his own will and *occasionally* prolonged his prayers; but experience soon proves to him that the discipline of prayer in the cloister is the result of long-matured thought on the part of the Church and of religious founders. The experience of ages has been embodied in the Divine Office; and the Spirit of Wisdom has guided the Church in adapting it to all the wants of the human soul, so that the Religious who recites his Office with attention and devotion cannot truthfully say that he prays less in the cloister than he did in the world; and if his prayer is less intelligent or less fervent the fault is due to his own neglect, for translations of the Latin text are now within the reach of all.

Seeing that the personal and local privileges accorded by the Church to religious persons and things are dependent on observance of the Rule (as can be seen from the Canonical Visitation of Religious Houses), it follows that there is the duty incumbent on superiors of giving the Divine Office its due place in the daily life of the convent; and they are likewise under the obligation of seeing that those under their charge are faithful to the discipline of the choir, and that the young are properly trained for the offices pertaining to it. Fidelity to the Divine Office, solicitude for its reverent recitation, and love of the choral in preference to private recitation are distinctive marks of good discipline in a Religious House; and the responsibility for its maintenance rests chiefly with the superior for the time being. It is safe to say that where relaxation creeps in, the origin is to be traced to neglect of choral discipline; for as the Divine Office is *the* work of the religious day—its beginning and its end—it follows that when it is held in low esteem the other duties of the cloister cannot be respected. It is likewise safe to say that relaxation cannot invade a Religious House unless the superior proves unworthy of his position. Let us not be misunderstood! No matter how excellent the superior may be, one or more *individuals* may become relaxed; but a *community* cannot depart from its original fervour,

unless he who holds the reins either tightens them to the point of exasperation or slackens them to extreme looseness. Where the reins are held lightly with a fatherly hand, the community as a whole will be responsive, especially in the matter with which we are now concerned—*i.e.*, the Divine Office. The superior, therefore, should take the lead in being present, short of some extraordinary demand for his presence elsewhere, and trivial pretexts for absence, on the part of Religious in general, should be considered as so many blows struck at God's honour, at the trust reposed in them by the Church and the institute, and at regular observance. In this greatest of all works in the cloister God is jealous of His rights, and no blessing can fall on the Religious House where those rights are disregarded: "My house shall be called the house of prayer." As the Divine Office is the *Official Prayer* of the Church and the cloister, that it is which essentially entitles any given convent to be called a House of Prayer. God forbid that a Religious House should ever become a mere assembly house for the shelter of relaxed Religious.

These reflections suggest pertinent inquiries into our conduct since the last Retreat. Have we held the Divine Office in great esteem? Have we regarded it as *the* great duty of our religious lives, or have we not, by giving it merely a secondary place in our thoughts, offended God, and scandalized our brethren? This, for example, is done by absenting oneself from choir without absolute and unforeseen necessity, by coming late, by neglect of remote preparation in finding out the "Proper" of the Office, by lack of due attention and devotion, and by irreverent attitudes in choir. If, through necessity, we have said our Office privately, have we given it precedence over all other duties; or have we not rather postponed it to a late hour and said it in "snatches," in places where distractions were unavoidable—*e.g.*, in the recreation room or even at table—to the disgust of all reverent Religious and the scandal of the brethren in general? If we in conscience must plead guilty to these or other disorders, how can we hope to escape the indignation of God, when He says: "Cursed be he that doth the work of the Lord deceitfully" (*Jer.* xlviii. 10). Let us, in God's name, determine to return at least to our original fervour by giving the Divine Office the first place in our affections and an honoured place in our order of the day. Let us be persuaded that no private prayer can approach in excellence the official prayer which unites us, not only with the chosen souls in

the Church Militant who are consecrated to the daily recitation of the Divine Office, but with the Celestial Choirs, whose hosannahs are ever voiced for the glory and honour of Almighty God.

3. The Religious who loves the Divine Office, and who shows that love by giving it its due place in his affections and in his order of the day, has no need to be reminded of the kindred duty of mental prayer, because no one can be an intelligent lover of the Office without being a lover of meditation. Elevation of the mind to God is the very soul of the Divine Office, and it is in this that meditation largely consists. Here again we may inquire concerning the origin of our right to the privileges granted to us by our Holy Mother the Church. If, in the hierarchy of the Church, we Religious rank as an honoured body, it is because of our voluntary separation from the world as a means to an end, and the end we had in view is the lifelong work of prayer and praise, of adoration and reparation. The Church regards us as her special bodyguard, and trusts us to keep alive, by day and by night, the fire of prayer, for the glory of God, the spread of the Gospel, the conversion of sinners, and in reparation for the misdeeds of the impenitent. In her *Way of Perfection*, St. Teresa insists that the *great* work of Religious is to make reparation to God for the sins of the world. While this sublime work is primarily done by the Divine Office, in which we act as a corporate body, it is strengthened and elevated by our personal mental and vocal prayers, in which the former takes precedence. The sturdier the units in any corporate body, the stronger the front presented to any enemy ; and if the units in the bodyguard of the Church are spiritually strong, high-minded, and pure, it follows that their united efforts will, through Divine grace, be pleasing to God and formidable to His enemies.

In the army of the prayerful all professed Religious should rank as veterans, for the discipline of mental prayer begun in the novitiate and continued daily to the hour of death is, if intelligently and perseveringly exercised, well adapted to make good soldiers of Jesus Christ and apt pupils of the Holy Spirit of God. If mental prayer is to be of lasting benefit, the beginning must be made in the novitiate by the teaching of a recognized system, which will serve as a scaffolding for all subsequent work, for nothing is more opposed to the spirit of prayer than ill-considered or (let us say)

intricate rules that have, sooner or later, to be abandoned. If mental prayer is to be effective, the Religious must bring to bear upon it all the powers of his soul, and must enlist on its side all that is furnished by his growing experiences in the natural and supernatural order. In too many cases it is to be feared that, in meditation, the soul confines itself in a watertight compartment, and sees no relationship whatever between God and His wonderful creation. Thus it comes to pass that mental prayer is dry and insipid and unproductive of results. As we have in previous meditations considered how the saints of God made all things within and without themselves minister to prayer, we need not now dwell on this, except to remark that in mental prayer the soul should, so to speak, be at once receptive and distributive. It should dispose itself to receive all that comes to it legitimately through the senses, all that appeals to it through the imagination, all that it remembers, and all that it thinks out, with a view to distributing generously the fruits that grow in meditation through the power of the Holy Ghost.

If remote preparation is made by the exercise of the Presence of God, by daily spiritual reading, by love of silence and by recollection ; if the proximate preparation (consisting of the usual acts and a more intimate exercise of the Presence of God) be fervent ; if the intellect be used on the lines above suggested, then the movements of the heart will be effective, and fruits meritorious of everlasting life will be ripened. Those fruits will be accepted by the God to whom they are offered—viz., acts of Humility, Gratitude, Praise, Adoration, Resignation, Love ; they will help towards our own sanctification and redound to the good of our neighbour, for, in the words of St. Augustine (*In lib. de Sp. et An.*, c. 50) : "Meditation leads to knowledge, knowledge excites compunction, and compunction engenders devotion which is the fruit and the perfection of prayer . . . devotion being a humble and pious sentiment that we entertain with regard to God ; humble because of the knowledge of our own imperfections, pious because of the consideration of the Divine bounty." No soul can be thus moved without making solid resolutions for its own betterment and for the improvement of its relationship with its neighbour. Thus it is that without regular meditation there can be no growth in the spiritual life—nay, there can be no efficacious barrier raised against the temptations of the devil, the world, and the flesh. So true is this that we have the authority of St. Teresa

for saying that he who does not meditate need not be tempted; he goes to Hell of his own accord: "With desolation is all the land made desolate: because there is none that considereth in the heart" (*Jer.* xii. 2).

Some questions arise naturally from the foregoing considerations: Have we, if superiors, afforded facilities to our subjects for meditation, and have all of us, as Religious, been mindful of our obligation to meditate daily according to rule? Have we taken as much pains to make progress in mental prayer as we have taken with secular studies, or have we, who perhaps have wrestled with difficult scientific and mathematical problems, pretended that we had not the capacity or the time for prayer? If so, we have reason to fear that the merest children in the Church will rise in judgment against us, for every Catholic child knows that prayer is but the raising of the mind and heart to God. Surely this is within the capacity of all! Yet in this matter we dare not be too insistent, for St. Teresa recognized that some souls find a difficulty in meditating. Speaking of herself she says: "I was more than fourteen years, during which I could never use even meditation, unless joined with reading," and speaking of another, she remarks: "I knew a very old person, who has led an exceedingly good life (God grant mine may be like hers!), and has been given to penance, and is moreover a great servant of God, having spent many hours and years in vocal prayer, but mental she could not use; the most she could do, was to continue a short time in her vocal prayers. Such, if they have humility, will not, I believe, be anything the worse in the end; but will share equally with those who enjoy many consolations. Martha was a saint,.though she is not said to be a contemplative."

Great as is the authority of St. Teresa, it does not, however, free a Religious from the necessity of doing his utmost to become proficient in mental prayer, for he who has sufficient mental capacity for the ordinary affairs of life has sufficient also to dwell affectionately on the goodness, the holiness, the providence, the mercy, and the love of God. If the great mysteries of Christianity —the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, the Wisdom of the Godhead—are too exalted for his mental powers, surely the birth, life, passion, and death of our Blessed Saviour are subjects quite within his ability. Therefore let no one say that he cannot raise his mind and heart to the great God who, in His condescension, stoops to listen to the lispings of the smallest child, and is attentive to the

loving aspirations of the meanest heart. God wishes only what we can give. If we with a good will give all that we have, small as it may be, it will be meritorious for everlasting life: "And there came a certain poor widow, and she cast in two mites, which make a farthing. And calling his disciples together, he saith to them: Amen I say to you, this poor widow hath cast in more than all they who have cast into the treasury. For all they did cast in of their abundance, but she of her want cast in all she had, even her whole living" (*St. Mark* xii. 42-44).

4. In the all-important matter of prayer it is good for us to take to heart the words of the *Imitation* (bk. iii., c. 1): "Let not Moses nor any of the prophets speak to me; but speak Thou rather, O Lord God, who art the inspirer and enlightener of all the prophets; for Thou alone without them canst perfectly instruct me, but they without Thee will avail me nothing." This sound advice should reassure us if we chance to read authors who discredit the possibility of *praying always*, for our Blessed Lord expressly says that we *are* to do so: "We ought always to pray, and not to faint" (*St. Luke* xviii. 1). St. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Thessalonians, v. 17, says: "Pray without ceasing"; and in his First Epistle to Timothy, ii. 8: "I will therefore that men pray in every place"; he, moreover, in his Epistle to the Romans, xii. 12, among many lessons of Christian virtues, advises them to be "instant" in prayer.

We have already seen that, according to the old adage, he who works for God's glory prays, and thus the industrious Religious may be said to pray always, but our Lord showed how even the most absorbing work may be accompanied by actual prayer: "And it came to pass that, as he was in a certain place praying, when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray . . . and he said to them: When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be Thy name" (*St. Luke* xi. 1, 2; *St. Matt.* vi. 9-13).

No work is too absorbing to prevent the elevation of the soul to the infinitely great Author of our being; nor is any place too distracting; so that no matter *where* we are or *what* we do, the all-satisfying passages of the Lord's Prayer can be constantly in our hearts and, when alone, even on our lips. This is, indeed, "praying always," for prayer is the raising of the mind and heart to God. Oh, how grateful we should be to our Blessed Lord and Teacher for epitomizing, as He has done in this best of all prayers, the duty

laid on us of praising, adoring, and thanking His Divine Father, of asking Him for all that we need, and, at the same time, for showing us how this duty is to be fulfilled. "*Father!*" How the aspiration reminds us of God's tenderness—a thing we might forget if we thought of Him only as a Judge or Creator. *Father in Heaven:* how we are lifted from the earth and made to forget the drudgery of our human lives; *Hallowed be Thy Name:* how new light is thrown on our vocation, which is to join with the angels and saints in praising the Name of God and in making reparation for blasphemies; *Thy Kingdom come:* how, in saying these words, or in feeling them in the heart, we hunger and thirst for conversions, passing in review all the nations and peoples who are still buried in darkness, and resolving, as far as we can, to bring them into the light; *Thy will be done:* who can breathe this without being filled with the martyr spirit of resignation, no matter how difficult our task or how harsh our penance? *Give us . . . our daily bread:* the passage is brimful of thought regarding God's Providence, and inundates us with reflections on His bounties in the spiritual order, especially in our own regard; *And forgive us . . . as we forgive others: now* we think of God as Judge, and filial fear possesses us, lest, in imitating the harsh steward, we merit his punishment; *And lead us not into temptation:* this phrase alone proves to us the need of praying always, for we are never safe from danger within and without.

Time and space fail us to do justice to this Divine prayer, which contains in itself more than man can exhaust, even though he prayed without ceasing for a thousand years—for it is the prayer of the Infinite to the Infinite, Christ, the God-Man, praying to His Eternal Father. Let us love it! In our labours and our journeyings; in our joys and in our sorrows; in our successes and our failures; in our triumphs and in our temptations, let the "Our Father" be our guide to prayer, and we shall never fail in praying always. To fail in praying always is to confess that one does not grasp the doctrine of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost in the soul: "He that believeth in me, as the scripture saith, out of his midst shall flow rivers of living water. Now this he said of the Spirit, which they should receive who believed in him" (*St. John* vii. 38, 39). "The charity of God is poured out into our hearts by the Holy Ghost who is given to us" (*Rom.* v. 5). "Know ye not that your members are the temple of the Holy Ghost, who is in you, whom you have from God?" (1 *Cor.* vi. 19).

The work begun by Christ in teaching His disciples to pray will be continued in us by the Holy Spirit, if we retain Him in our souls by persevering in grace, meditate on His gifts and His fruits, profess our gratitude for all, and humbly ask Him to teach us how to pray. We shall thus be preserved from sin, mindful of the words: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby you are sealed" (*Eph.* iv. 30). "But if any man violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy. For the temple of God is holy, which you are" (1 *Cor.* iii. 16, 17). We shall also be led into the sweet, safe way of virtue, for "the Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings" (*Rom.* viii. 26), and conducted by Him to the very gate of Heaven: for "he is the pledge of our inheritance" (*Eph.* i. 14).

XXIV.—DA SALUTIS EXITUM

(Grant us in death to see Thy face.)

1. NOW that we are approaching the end of our Retreat, we should be deeply convinced that all our deliberations will have been vain if we return to our duties without a certain sense of security as to how we stand with our Lord and our God. While no man knows with physical certainty whether he is worthy of praise or blame, the Religious should be at least morally certain of his safety. This assurance is dependent partly on his docility in listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit within his soul, urging him to repentance for his past misde eds, andpartly on his fidelity in fulfilling the conditions laid down by our Holy Mother the Church for his reconciliation and final perseverance.

The whole trend of a Retreat is either to excite an always watchful soul to still greater vigilance, or to wake up a slumbering soul to a sense of its danger. From the moment that the Holy Ghost is first invoked until the hour approaches for the Papal Blessing, that Spirit—responsive to the invocation—with all-pervading sweetness hovers over the soul to bedew it with grace for the ripening of the virtues most required for its sanctification. No matter how great the number of retreatants, each soul is impressed in some special way and receives its own particular message. New light is thrown on ways that were dark, on methods that were imperfect, on sins that were doubtful, on temptations that were bewildering. Perhaps some hidden sin is unearthed, or some imaginary sin buried—the former causing in the past subconscious uneasiness, the latter impeding one's progress by causing timidity. The great truths of our Holy Faith, which in the course of the year are dwelt on in disconnected fashion, are in Retreat considered to greater advantage, for in the silence and solitude of this holy time they have a setting more worthy of their dignity. The duties of our state of life seen in a detached way (for in Retreat they are, as far as possible, suspended) are better understood than when we are actively engaged in them. Thus it is that the close of our religious exercises should find us purged of all past sin by the sincerity of our confession, and armed for future conflicts by practical resolutions based on the knowledge of ourselves which, through the light of the Holy Ghost, we have

gained during these days of recollection. This gives the feeling of security we spoke of—a feeling that, humanly speaking, we have done our utmost, and that if God chose to call us now, we should be better prepared to meet Him than at any previous time in our lives.

In this feeling there is no presumption: on the contrary, deep down in the heart there is a sense of our own sinfulness which was foreign to us until now, together with the strong conviction that if we are in the grace of God it is entirely due to His mercy. Indeed, we leave our Retreat awestricken at the patience of God. We entered it like criminals shuffling confusedly towards a judgment seat; we leave it with head erect, extolling the infinite bounty of our Heavenly Father, the saving power of the Precious Blood of His Divine Son, the illuminating influence of the Holy Ghost. We feel ready to die rather than ever wilfully sin again.

Without wishing to forestall the decree of Divine Providence, many souls would fain die after the reception of the Plenary Indulgence attached to the Papal Blessing, so as to see at once the Face of Him who on earth can be seen only in a dark manner as through a glass. Their meditations have so deepened their hatred of the world and of sin, their fear of relapse, their knowledge of the Divine perfections, and have so heightened their estimate of the joys of Heaven, that, like St. Paul, they would wish to be dissolved so as to be with Christ. For the moment the earth has for them no longer any attraction; creatures are seen in their proper proportions; the works of the flesh are loathed; the aspirations of the soul are allowed full sway; and these aspirations, elevated, pure, strong, and imperious, if voiced, would ring out: "O God, it is better for us to die than to live; better to live face to face with Thee in Thy courts than to stay longer in the tents of sinners; better to be safe with Thee in heavenly mansions than to roam where spiritual thieves break in and steal."

This language may seem exalted, but it should, nevertheless, be the ordinary interior speech of the true Religious, for such a man should be daily prepared to die. If vocation means anything at all, it surely means a preference for things Divine: but things Divine are on earth seen only in a dark manner, they are seen only in part; in Heaven they are seen face to face and wholly as they are. He who wishes the end wishes also the means; and as the only means of entering into the joy of the Lord is by the gate of death, the good Religious so lives as to be ready at a moment's notice to

obey the summons of Omnipotence: "Come ye blessed of my Father." "For by a man came death, and by a man the resurrection of the dead. And as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 *Cor.* xvi. 21, 22). Thus it is that in the depths of his soul death for him has no terrors. True, his temperament may make him shrink from the physical terrors usually attendant on the closing hours of life; but the true Religious rises superior to temperament, and by a daily generous offering of himself to God and a ready acquiescence beforehand in all the circumstances of his death, with regard to time, place, and manner, he trains himself in the school of the watchful virgins, whose lamps were always trimmed in expectation of the Bridegroom.

Not only the carnal-minded—who understand not the things that are of God—but the average Christian may consider the foregoing attitude inseparable from gloomy preoccupation of mind, but that it is not really so can be vouched for by the testimony of many who live the devout life, and by an appeal to the lives of many of the saints. The devout life supposes a keen appreciation of the truth that, no matter how appealing and holy and sublime life in the world may be, life on earth is, nevertheless, a state of exile from one's true home. A longing for one's true home suggests a constant joyous preparedness to set out for it as the most desirable of all possible journeys. That journey is the way of death, and with a full and grateful heart it is welcomed: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" (1 *Cor.* xv. 55). "And now, O Lord, I beseech thee, take my life from me: for it is better for me to die than to live" (*Jonas* iv. 3). "To me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (*Phil.* i. 21). "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (*Ps.* cxv. 15).

2. If one even tries to reach the standard of preparedness mentioned in the preceding point he will save himself from many inconsistencies, not to say dangers. How inconsistent the man who, dedicated to the service of God, is ever intending to do something worthy of his vocation before he dies, but attempts not the fulfilment till too late: "The night cometh when no man can work" (*St. John* ix. 4). The years pass, and with them numberless golden opportunities, but such a man seizes them not, nay! sometimes exposes himself to ridicule by his impotent efforts to redeem the time when it is fast flitting from him, and when his

energies are impaired beyond all hope of restoration. When one is old and frail, or even young but stricken by illness, he is for all practical purposes dead, and hence if he has in his vigour only *dreamt* of prayer, and work, and penance, and duty, as things to be done *some* day, he will leave the world as a dreamer and will find no merit stored up for him in Heaven. Had he but thought, if not daily at least occasionally, of the uncertainty of the hour of death and of the necessity of being *always* ready, how much more meritorious would have been his labours. "My days have passed more swiftly than the web is cut by the weaver, and are consumed without any hope" (*Job* vii. 6).

That man also is inconsistent who talks of "entering into" himself some day, and by a sincere confession effecting a salutary change in his life. The statement has only to be set down in cold print to show its absurdity—nay, its temerity—for *every* confession should be what is commonly called "a death-bed confession," with this important distinction, that when a man is in full possession of his faculties his confession should be much more complete than when those faculties are impaired by sickness or disease. He who does not give full measure of service to God when in health and vigour will not (short of a miracle) do so when he is old or infirm.

The thought of death saves the soul from that greatest of all dangers in the spiritual life—viz., the sin of relapse. What soul could dare brave the wrath of God by repeating the same sin, if it seriously reflected on the possibility of being suddenly thrust through the gate of death to find itself before the all-holy Judge? The purpose of amendment in confession should therefore be strengthened by meditating deeply on the uncertainty of the hour of death, for if this were done, not only would relapses be less frequent, but sin of all kinds would be abhorrent to the soul thus filled with fear of an unprovided death.

One cannot meditate habitually on his own death without being moved to pray for those who are daily joining the long procession towards the gates of eternity; and we Religious should pay special heed to the words of the saintly Pontiff Pius X., who in a Brief, dated February 12, 1914, said: "Desiring to make known how much we appreciate this most praiseworthy institution (the Pious Union of St. Joseph's Death), we wish our name to be the first to be inscribed among its associates, exhorting all our beloved brethren of the clergy to remember each day in the Divine

Sacrifice those in their agony. We would wish also the faithful —particularly Religious of both sexes—to acquire the habit of offering up special prayers to God and to St. Joseph on behalf of the dying; for if praying for the dead, who have already reached the harbour of salvation, is a holy and wholesome thought, not less worthy is it to implore the help of Heaven for those unhappy ones who are come to that hour of gravest peril, upon which their eternity depends."

Preparedness for death has more than a spiritual side. Spiritually speaking it conduces to unrelenting hatred of sin, to purity of soul, to peace and goodwill towards all men, to seriousness joined with serenity, to interior peace and holy independence as to place, persons, and things. In this state of preparedness the soul, in lingering close by the grave which to its eyes is ever open, sees far beyond that grave, and the scene is altogether enchanting; for angels seem to smile and saints seem to beckon, and Mary and Joseph are expectant; thus the contemplation of the grave, far from being repugnant, becomes positively welcome—rich with memories of One who long ago was likewise buried, but rose the third day immortal and impassible, who ascended to the right hand of His Father to welcome all the members that should be faithful unto death to Him their Head.

Apart from the spiritual side, preparedness for death is of very great value in increasing the amenities of life, for he who would be prepared deems it necessary so to labour as to lessen the cares and troubles of his neighbours after his death. He tries to be scrupulously exact, tidy, and orderly, faithful in his book-keeping if in a position of trust, prudent with regard to correspondence of a confidential character; and all with a view to causing as little trouble as possible *after* death in atonement for the trouble he may have occasioned during life. To such a man the passage from time to eternity is a joy, for in that passage he anticipates rest from labour and perfect peace after the storms of life. The grave is regarded merely as a harbour for the body, and he hopes that the soul now free will land on the happy shore of a blissful eternity.

3. In her Ritual, our Holy Mother the Church prays that the departing soul may see the Redeemer face to face, may behold with blessed eyes the fullest revelation of truth, and, placed in the ranks of the Blessed, may be favoured with the sweetness of

Divine contemplation for ever; but that this felicity may be enjoyed, the soul must successfully pass through the ordeal of judgment: "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (*Heb.* ix. 27). To the faithful Religious the thought of judgment is at once awe-inspiring and consoling: awe-inspiring because of the Majesty, the Omniscience, the Holiness, and the infinite Justice of God; consoling because of His equally infinite Mercy. Only to the unfaithful soul need judgment be full of terrors.

It is but just that we should be judged, for there must not be denied to God a right which He Himself concedes to earthly rulers; and indeed it is this very concession to earthly superiors which leads the thoughtful soul to rejoice that God will at the last be his sole Judge. For few men live their lives without having reason to doubt the justice or the wisdom of human decisions by which they must needs abide, and their only consolation is that, in God's own time, full justice will be done them. Fewer still go down to the grave without being rashly judged by those who have no commission at all from Almighty God; but the hour of their most poignant humiliation is the hour of their liveliest hope, that in the passage from time to eternity the Supreme Judge will hold the scales evenly. Without such hope how great would be the harvest of despair reaped by the arch-enemy of souls, who tips the tongues of men with malice for the discouragement of those whom they judge. If those who are prone to judge their neighbour, either lightly or harshly, only witnessed the earnestness of the appeal to God's judgment seat and the deep conviction that the Supreme Arbiter will see justice done, they would tremble for their own safety in the hour which likewise awaits themselves: "And they that have done good things shall come forth into the resurrection of life; but they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of judgment" (*St. John* v. 29).

Awestricken though he is, the man of faith looks forward to judgment with a sense of relief, feeling like David that it is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. He recognizes that from the age of reason till the hour of death he has been a steward over many good things entrusted to him by his Creator, and he readily admits that a strict account of his stewardship must be demanded; for he himself has exacted such from his neighbour. Those good things in the natural and supernatural order have been repeatedly passed under review in our

Retreat, and we have now to reflect that all of them will form the subject-matter of judgment. God will not ask from us more than He has given, unless to demand an account of *how* we have used our gifts. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed: nor hidden, that shall not be known. For whatsoever things you have spoken in darkness, shall be published in the light" (*St. Luke* xii. 2, 3).

The minuteness with which we have entered into details during the progress of the Retreat spares us the necessity of enumerating the points that will be made clear to the mind when the soul is all alone with God in the particular judgment. "Every man's work shall be manifest" (1 *Cor.* iii. 13). "For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that every man may receive the proper things of the body, according as he has done, whether it be good or evil" (2 *Cor.* v. 10). "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (*St. Matt.* xii. 36, 37). That soul will have nothing to say for or against itself, for God in judgment is not investigating as does a poor human judge, He is simply allowing the soul to see itself as it is, and the soul acquiesces and says: "O God, whether for or against me, Thy judgment is infinitely just, for Thou art Truth, and Justice, and Love, and Mercy—Thou art the Great All!"

God, knowing that the prospect of judgment is calculated to fill the sinner with fear, for "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (*Heb.* x. 31), has, in His superabundant mercy, smoothed the way for a favourable judgment by setting up the holy tribunal of Penance, in which He sits, in the person of His minister, to pass judgment long before the appointed hour. Who but a God of infinite wisdom could have devised such a salutary means of enabling the wayfarer to have a moral certainty of receiving a favourable sentence at the last? Oh, the ineffable wisdom, love, and mercy of the God whom we have so often and so grievously offended! Blessed for ever be His holy Name! Truly, if other proofs of the divinity of our holy religion were wanting, the sacred tribunal of Penance would be more than sufficient to establish it, for no human mind could have thought it out, and no human will could have constrained men to kneel down and disclose their most secret thoughts and their most shameful deeds. The finger of God is here!

The Sacrament of Penance rightly received is the pledge of a favourable judgment, just as worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist is the pledge of everlasting life. In instituting it, Christ said, "Peace be to you!" and He showed His hands and His side to prove how peace had been won. It was won only at the price of shame, suffering, and death. In giving His priests power to forgive sins, or to refuse forgiveness, He knew that the confession of guilt would cause many pangs and deep humiliation; but oh, nothing at all compared to the humiliations attendant on His passion and death. He also knew that such confession would be, and He meant it to be, a salutary preparation for judgment. He seems even now to say: "My child, grievously have you erred in turning from Me to the creature. Return! return by means of the ministrations of the creature whom I have ordained to hear your tale of sin. I have commissioned him to forgive you in My Name, and in the Name of the Father and the Holy Ghost. Amen I say to you, if thus you judge yourself during life I, in the dread moment of judgment, will impart a final absolution, saying: 'Child, you have admitted your sins in the judgment seat set up by Me on earth: you have been forgiven by My anointed priest. There is nothing against you in the Book of Life and Death. Enter into your reward.'"

XXV.—DA PERENNE GAUDIUM

(And endless joys inherit.)

1. NO one is more conscious than the devout Religious that the earth is the scene of many innocent joys—joys which the sorrows sometimes cast athwart them cannot quench. If it is true to say that joy is often turned into sorrow, it is equally true that sorrow is as often changed into joy. There is a joy of living, which is as far removed from sensuous indulgence as an Alpine peak is from a deep crevasse—the joy of breathing wholesome air, gazing on picturesque stretches of land and water; listening to enchanting melodies, or soul-moving harmonies; clasping hands in pure and lasting friendship; taking the measure of obstacles in the way, and weighing the chances of success when all the odds seem to be against us: all these are joys which, far from being obscured by the passing shadows of sorrow, are rather brought into higher relief. And yet if we sum them up, add to them a thousand other joys that we may have experienced, and anticipate or imagine ten thousand more, we, if honest, shall be forced to say: "Our dream, our hope of joy, is incomplete, for while we can picture *endless joys*, and while our souls long for such, we realize that on earth we can have only joys that are intermittent—joys that are shadowed by sorrow upon sorrow—joys that will end.

This is but another way of voicing what was said by St. Augustine: "I have been created for Thee, O my God, and my soul cannot rest until it reposes in Thee."

Coming from the hands of God, and destined to return to Him, the soul cannot find on the earth anything at all completely satisfying. If men are found base enough to say that they are perfectly contented with what they have and hold, knowing as they do that they have no fixity of tenure here below, our folly if we attempted to reason with them would be as great as their own, for our Lord Himself said that we must not cast pearls before swine: "For we have not here a lasting city—we seek one that is to come" (*Heb.* xiii. 14). "Wo to you that are rich, for you have your consolation. Wo to you that are filled, for you shall hunger. Wo to you that now laugh, for you shall mourn and weep" (*St. Luke* vi. 24, 25). Thus speaks our Lord to those who profess contentedness with the things of earth and seek not the lasting

blessings of Heaven. To be contented with the earth and the things that are on the earth, to be satisfied with the joys that are within our reach, to be happy with the knowledge that we have and at ease with the peace we enjoy, would be to rest on a level ill becoming one made to the image of God, who in the hour of his creation was given dominion over the earth, and with his feet spurning the dust, and his head upraised, was bidden to seek God as his one great reward: "I am thy reward exceeding great" (*Gen.* xv. 1).

The earth and all its wonders and riches, from the starry canopy above to the jewelled caverns underneath; the earth and all its joys, from the smile on a baby's face to the radiance of a good old age; the earth and all the happiness that comes from the revelation of its secrets; the earth and all the peace that comes on its surface to men of goodwill are only a slight foretaste of the riches, the joys, the knowledge, and the peace reserved for us in Heaven. Compared with Heaven, they are what the footstool is to the throne, what the grey early dawn is to the noonday glory, what the shadow is to the substance. Whatever of good there is on earth is given by Almighty God to whet our appetite for more; and the restlessness that is in every soul, unless that soul is clogged with vicious inclinations that weigh it down, is but an unconscious yearning to have full measure of all the blessings that it now enjoys only in part. "We see now through a glass in a dark manner, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know even as I am known" (1 *Cor.* xiii. 12).

2. If we reconsider the meditations now being brought to a close, we shall recognize that the main idea running through them has been to insist on the importance of using all that we have received from God as a means of gaining all that we hope for. Gifts in the natural and supernatural order, time, talents, opportunities; powers of the soul, senses of the body, and relationship with others; graces, special lights, and extraordinary visitations, are to be regarded as means to an end, not as ends in themselves capable of satisfying the longings of the human soul. The true Religious is, most of all men, to distinguish himself in all-round activity of mind and body so as to show his gratitude for gifts received, to merit the grace of final perseverance, and to enlarge his capacity for enjoying the still greater gifts awaiting him on the shores of eternity: "Cast thy bread upon the running waters: for after a long time

thou shalt find it again" (*Eccles.* xi. 1). "Be thou faithful unto death : and I will give thee the crown of life" (*Apoc.* ii. 10).

The deeper his study, the more conscious he is of his ignorance and of the impotence of the human mind, no matter how gifted, to unravel even the smallest mystery in the natural—not to speak of the supernatural—order. The greatest men are the most candid in avowing that they can but furnish us with the properties of things, and that the essence of things is hidden from their eyes. And yet how the Religious, out of his love for all that God has made, desires to know. *In Heaven all will be seen and known in God.* "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 *Cor.* ii. 9).

The fuller his cup of joy the greater the danger of it being dashed from his lips, nay ! the surer he is of having to suffer much, for only through many tribulations can we reach the Kingdom of God. Yet how his soul pants for joy ! *In Heaven it will be his portion,* for it is written : "So also you now indeed have sorrow, but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice ; and your joy no man shall take from you" (*St. John* xvi. 22). "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes : and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away" (*Apoc.* xxi. 4).

While there is *no* peace with the wicked, there is only a moderate allowance doled out to the good (for a man's enemies are those of his own household); but small as that allowance may be in the souls of those striving after sanctification, its sweetness fills them with a longing for that perfect peace—the tranquillity of perfect order—which cannot be found on earth. Even when in exceptional cases the soul enjoys a very large measure of peace, it feels that it is nothing compared with what God holds in reserve. *In Heaven perfect peace will be enjoyed for ever.* "In that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. . . . Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth, do I give unto you" (*St. John* xiv. 20-27).

God, as we have seen in almost every meditation, is the most generous of benefactors ; but what He gives He sometimes, for providential reasons, withdraws ; and so, like Job, the soul, as the years pass by, is constrained to say : "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away : blessed be the name of the Lord"

(*Job* i. 21). Friends drop off or are taken away, and memory fails, and just as limbs grow weak, so mental powers become enfeebled, and even spiritual favours lose their power to fill us with enthusiasm as formerly, and our hold on the supernatural seems slackened—for while the spirit is willing the flesh is weak. Yet all this is quite in keeping with Divine Revelation, for we are told not to lay up treasure where thieves break in and steal, or where the rust and the moth consume, but to lay up treasure in Heaven, where it is imperishable. *In Heaven the treasure given us by God will endure for ever and for ever.* "For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality" (1 *Cor.* xv. 53).

The treasure laid up for us, if we but persevere to the end, is God Himself in Unity and Trinity, in Majesty and in Power, in Beauty and in Tenderness, in Love and in Condescension, in fullest and yet inexhaustible Revelation; for, endowed with the Light of Glory, we shall see Him as He is, and in Him we shall see and enjoy all things, and yet shall never exhaust His Infinite Perfections. How truly, therefore, can we join with the Psalmist in saying: "I shall be satisfied when thy glory shall appear" (*Ps.* xvi. 13). "For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal" (2 *Cor.* iv. 18). Yes! the happiness, the joy, the peace, the treasure that we seek, will not only satisfy all the longings of the soul, but will last for ever and for ever. "But let all them be glad that hope in thee: they shall rejoice for ever, and thou shalt dwell in them" (*Ps.* v. 12). "Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever" (*Ps.* lxxii. 26).

Meditating on these sublime truths, we no longer find it difficult to understand that "the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (*St. Matt.* xi. 12), nor can we complain that Almighy God exacts of His children a service proportioned to the magnificence of the everlasting reward: not that such service can ever in itself be fully satisfying; but here again our Blessed Lord comes to our assistance and more than supplies our deficiencies.

3. In answer to the question: "Who shall ascend into the mountain of the Lord: or who shall stand in his holy place?" the royal Psalmist says: "The innocent in hands and clean of heart" (*Ps.* xiii. 3, 4). The words would be well calculated to fill us with confusion, conscious as we are of our past transgressions and

our many daily failings, but that our Lord, who sitteth at the right hand of the Father and who knows well the purity required for the enjoyment of heavenly bliss, has provided a tribunal for the cleansing of our hearts, and has spread a table for the strengthening of our spiritual life. Oh, the wonders of our Holy Faith! Oh, the miracles of God's love! What marvellous coherence we find in all the dispositions of His Providence! Although St. Paul asks us, if we be risen with Christ, to seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father, we could not dare hope to enjoy those things were it not for Christ's solemn pronouncement: "He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me . . . He that eateth this bread shall live for ever" (*St. John* vi. 58, 59). In giving us His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity in the Holy Eucharist, Jesus Christ provides us daily with a pledge of everlasting life. Truly the Kingdom of God is within us, for with Jesus in our bosom the passions are quelled as were the raging waters on the Sea of Galilee, the heart is purified and ennobled with the wine that maketh virgins, the lips are anointed and the voice attuned for the singing of celestial hymns, the whole man is transformed, and he becomes another Christ: "He that eateth me, the same also shall live by me." Therefore to be worthy to receive Holy Communion daily is to be prepared day by day to enter the Kingdom presided over by the King who deigns to visit the lowly tabernacle of our souls. The Holy Eucharist is the Divinely appointed means of preparing for our everlasting rest in the Heavenly Kingdom. "There remaineth, therefore, a day of rest for the people of God . . . let us hasten, therefore, to enter into that rest . . . let us go, therefore, with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy, and find grace in seasonable aid" (*Heb.* iv. 9-16).

No one who aspires to live with God can be indifferent with regard to those who surround His throne. Above all those created by Him for the praise and glory of His Name there is one who has been specially chosen and appointed by Himself to receive our homage, and to be regarded as our mother. To be cold in devotion to Mary is to dishonour God the Father who exalted her, God the Holy Ghost who espoused her, and Jesus Christ who is the fruit of her womb. To be remiss in praying daily to Mary, our mother, is to be disobedient to Christ, who with His dying lips commended her to us. To discredit the dignity of Mary and her place in the Divine Plan of Redemption is to bring a blight on

the soul and a curse on the body. We, to our horror and dismay, find this verified more and more distinctly in every country where heresy has secured a footing. In such lands the intellects of men are blinded by pride, and their bodies are corrupted by impurity. Let us Religious be conspicuous for our love of the ever-Immaculate Virgin and Mother, who now reigns as queen of the Kingdom to which we aspire, and let that love be manifested by our humility and our ready response to all the invitations of the Holy Ghost, as made clear to us by Holy Mother Church and our lawful superiors. After the Holy Eucharist, devotion to Mary is a most certain sign of predestination.

A longing for Heaven brings necessarily in its train devotion to all the angels and saints of God, especially those angels who shine most brightly in the Liturgy of the Church, and the saints whose lives most influenced us when God was leading us to His own sweet service in the cloister; and the reality of our faith in the life to come is not least shown by a tender, generous, self-sacrificing love of the holy souls in purgatory. To be solicitous in helping them to a speedy entrance into everlasting joy is to be assured of swift and efficacious help to obtain our endless heritage.

These, in brief, are the devotions and practices which, under God, will be most conducive to our final perseverance: "But he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved" (*St. Matt.* x. 22).

Devotion to the Holy Eucharist will keep us "innocent in hands and clean of heart"; devotion to Mary will help us to be humble, pure, and obedient. Devotion to the angels and saints will tend to elevation of soul and to strenuousness in fulfilling our daily duties. Devotion to the holy souls will inspire us with a spirit of self-sacrifice, for in leading us to the regular, if not daily, exercise of the "Way of the Cross," the sight of the sufferings of Christ will remind us that the Heaven we seek was purchased for us at a great price, and that only the violent shall bear it away. We shall imitate the Master by doing violence to flesh and blood, hoping through His merits, and the mercy of the Eternal Father, and the graces, gifts, and fruits of the Holy Ghost, to be one day lifted up from our miseries, and made happy for ever by the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant, because thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will place thee over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord" (*St. Matt.* xxv. 21).

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